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Chapter 1

Situational Ethics

4 Privet Drive

Harry sat on his bed, assessing his life. He had been a virtual prisoner in his room since he had returned following Sirius' death in the Department of Mysteries. He had not received a single letter from any of his friends since his return, even though he had written numerous times. The few times he had attempted to even take a walk, one of the Order's guards had immediately herded him back into the house to face the tender mercies of his relatives. The Dursleys were not forcing him to do chores on the outside of the house, since they now knew that the Order was watching them, however they worked him like a slave on the inside, allowing Dudley to beat on him, then Petunia's husband Vernon (Harry refused to call him 'Uncle' anymore) would stand over him while he wrote the obligatory letter every third day assuring the Order that he was alright.

Harry was, however, far from alright. Mad-Eye Moody's threats at the train station had the opposite effect from what he had intended. When Harry had arrived at the Dursley home, Vernon had only waited until the door was closed before he had slammed his fist into Harry's head while Petunia had looked on with a satisfied expression on her face. As soon as Harry hit the floor from Vernon's assault, Dudley had waddled up and kicked Harry viciously between the legs. The Dursley males continued the assault for over 10 minutes, leaving Harry bloody and unconscious on the floor. When he awoke, Harry

was forced to clean up the bloody mess. Harry was also beaten every time he had a nightmare or a vision from Voldemort that happened to wake up Vernon.

And speaking of Voldemort, he couldn't forget him, could he? Between Voldemort and his Death Eaters and their inbred offspring, everyone who Harry had ever cared for had either been killed, injured or placed in mortal danger. Now it seemed that the fear of danger had alienated all of his friends from him. Harry had to figure that it was either a fear of Voldemort or instructions from Dumbledore, in which case he had no friends. Just thinking of Dumbledore brought back every bit of rage that Harry had felt in the Hogwarts Headmaster's office after the battle at the Ministry.

'With friends like him, who the hell needs enemies?,' Harry thought. 'I am royally sick of all of it! I have been used, abused, wadded up and thrown away. Some wonderful life and heritage I received. I would have been better off if I had never heard of magic!'

Harry took a piece of parchment and quill, drew a line down the middle, making two columns. On the first column, he headed it "Reasons to stay and fight", and on the other column, "Reasons to tell them to go to Hell". He began listing the reasons in the second column first, since there were so many more of them and they were easier to think of. When he had finished, he tried to think of things for the first column. The only thing that he could think of was revenge against Voldemort and his Death Eaters for the deaths of people he loved or cared about. He had started to write down 'Protect the innocent', however he remembered the way he had been slandered in the press and by the Ministry, only to have everyone believe it. He quickly drew a line through that reason. He then sat back and looked at the parchment. On the right side, there was a long list of grievances stretching all the way to the bottom. On the left, one word, 'revenge'.

But revenge on whom? Voldemort? The Death Eaters? Harry had

begun to consider Voldemort the personification of Evil, more of a force of nature than a real human. There could be no real revenge against a force of nature. And as far as the Death Eaters went, they were doing nothing more than following their stated beliefs in pureblood superiority, one that was shared by the very government they were attempting to overthrow. The sheeple of the magical world either feared them or supported them, but would never actively oppose them. They would do nothing more than bleat as the wolves tore their throats out.

When it came right down to it, there were only four people he wanted revenge on. He wanted revenge on them so badly, he was willing to make a deal with the devil himself to achieve it. It was at that moment that he began, for the first time, to understand what drove the orphan Tom Riddle to become the dreaded Lord Voldemort. Harry turned the parchment over and began to plan.

Two days later, Harry slipped out of the house under his invisibility cloak on the heels of Vernon Dursley. Vernon's regular morning routine was to open the car door and release the latch on the car's bonnet in order to check the oil and other fluids before starting the car and driving to work. It was easy to slip into the open car door and hide in the back seat while he was making his check. Harry lay on the floor under his cloak as Vernon drove into work. After he parked in the company lot and left, Harry slipped out of the car and caught a bus into London. Three busses and a short underground ride later, Harry was standing, still under his cloak, outside the Leaky Cauldron waiting for a customer to enter so he could follow them through. His luck held as he saw, of all people, Percy Weasley striding up to the door, holding a muggle briefcase in one hand and speaking on a cell phone. As Percy got closer, Harry heard his conversation.

"The Minister sent me to the Muggle Prime Minister's office to pick up some documents that had been promised. No, it was too sensitive to send me by floo, the Minister seems to think that the floo network is being monitored and didn't want to take the chance. Anyway, I need

to go, I'm almost to Diagon Alley and I will lose the signal there. Bye."

As Percy broke the connection, he swept through the door, Harry following closely on his heels, still underneath the cloak. Percy looked neither right nor left as he went to the brick wall and began tapping the bricks which would gain him entrance to Diagon Alley. Percy never noticed the slight rustle of fabric as he stepped resolutely through the now-open wall and into the Alley. As Percy turned to close the entrance, Harry slipped to his blind side and quickly strode away.

Removing the cloak as he entered Gringotts, Harry went up to the security goblin's desk, presented his key, and asked politely to speak with his account manager. The goblin looked up the number on the key, sharply looked at Harry's scar, and growled, "Mr. Potter, you are 15 minutes late."

"What do you mean, late? I had no idea that I had an appointment to start with," Harry protested.

"Aren't you hear for the reading of Sirius Black's will?" the goblin asked.

"I received no notice." Harry was beginning to see where this was going. "Where did you send notice?"

"Where we have sent everything for the past 15 years, to Albus Dumbledore. He is already here."

"Interesting. Please have someone escort me. I believe that I need to be there." The security goblin waved at a coworker and asked him to escort Harry to Griphook's office. As Harry walked in the office, Dumbledore spotted him and his eyes lost the patented twinkle. It seemed to Harry that Dumbledore appeared nervous.

"Harry! What are you doing here? Are you being escorted?"

"I might ask you the same thing. Why was I not notified about this? Just what the hell are you trying to pull? Is it not enough that you try and control my every move? Are you now trying to defraud me of my inheritance?" At the word 'defraud', Dumbledore paled and the goblin behind the desk showed more pointed teeth than Harry would have imagined that any creature could have possessed. Sitting down, Harry nodded at the goblin to let him know he was ready to hear the will.

"Well, Mr. Potter. As you are aware, Sirius Black was your legal guardian, named by your parents. That was never rescinded, an oversight I am sure, when he was sent to Azkaban...."

"WHAT!?" Harry exploded. "I was never told about this! In fact, it seems there were a lot of things that I was not told." Harry fixed Dumbledore with a glare, and the old wizard seemed to visibly shrink.

"Hem.. To continue.. Since he was your guardian at the time of his death, this document takes effect." The goblin handed Harry a parchment. It was dated just weeks before Sirius' death, and was a magically binding document granting Harry emancipation. There was also a note clipped onto the document. Harry read.

"Dear Harry. If you are reading this, I am now with your parents. I believe that you are mature enough to make your own decisions. I wish to heck I could say that being of sound mind, I spent it all, but two things stop me from that. The first is finding someone who would agree that I was of sound mind, and the second being that there is just too damn much to spend by myself. Pup, I wish I could be there to spend it with you, but I must have screwed up somewhere.

Harry, the thing that I must warn you about is Dumbledore. I hate to believe it, but I have come to the conclusion that he does not have your best interests at heart. You have become a means to an end,

that being a weapon against Voldemort. If you decide to fight Riddle, make it your decision, do not be manipulated by Albus. Good luck either way.

The goblin will be reading the will in a bit, but I want to give you a heads up. I left everything to you, down to the last knut. Every property, all the vault contents, the title of Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, all of it. You even get the damn house elf, although he will probably keel over when he finds out that you are his new owner.

Hope to see you in a hundred years or so,

Love,

Padfoot

Harry finished reading the note, then looked up at the goblin. "Knowing what this says, is there any purpose for Mr. Dumbledore to be here?"

The goblin grinned his toothy smile. "None whatsoever, sir."

"In that case, would you have someone escort Dumbledore from here? I believe that I would like to hear this alone."

With another insane grin, the goblin pushed a button on his desk, and two large security goblins came in the office. They took each arm of the protesting Dumbledore and quickly escorted him out of the room. The goblin behind the desk stood up and walked around to Harry, holding out his hand.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter. My name is Flickaxe. I have been account manager for the Black and Potter families for the past 57 years. I hope to continue that position. I am grateful that you had Dumbledore removed. He has been a nightmare to deal with.

Anyway, let's get on with the reading."

There were no real surprises other than the amounts that Harry had inherited. He had no idea that the Black family had been so wealthy. Flickaxe explained that the Black family had made solid investments and that very little had been spent in the last 13 years. His vault for the Potter family had seen much more activity, with Harry's school expenses and a regular monthly stipend coming out of the smaller trust account. He explained that the Dursley's had been given a bit over £3000 per month for Harry's upkeep. At this, Harry literally blew a gasket.

"And those bastards starved me, made me wear that pig's cast-off clothes, and made me their house elf? They could have fed the whole family, me included, steak for all of these years. Instead, they made me feel I was a drain on them!" Harry was definitely having evil thoughts toward his now ex guardians. "Make sure the payments are stopped immediately."

Flickaxe

"Is there anything else we can assist you with today?"

Harry thought a moment. "As a matter of fact, there is. I would like to hire a team of wizards to redo the wards on my property at 12 Grimmauld Place. I want a new Fidelus charm placed on it with myself as the secret keeper. I would also like to rent a couple of your security goblins to clear out any.. unwelcome guests. I also need a full set of muggle identification, make the name on it "James Black". And last, at least for now, is there some way I can carry large amounts of both wizarding and muggle money so I am not always having to run to the bank?"

Flickaxe was writing furiously. "That can all be arranged. The curse-breakers should be getting notice anytime now.." Seeing Harry's confused look, he snickered. "Spelled Parchment. As I write,

the orders are being read by my assistant."

"Whoa. In that case, make sure Bill Weasley is not on the team. He is one of Dumbledore's supporters. I don't want him to face a dilemma about his loyalties." Flickaxe quickly made a note of that. When he finished writing, there was a knock on the door and a familiar face popped in. It was Griphook, one of the few goblins Harry recognized by sight. Harry greeted him by name, making Griphook break out in a happy, but fierce grin. He gave a quick bow, deposited a parcel on Flickaxe's desk, then quickly exited. Flickaxe opened the parcel and took out a couple of items.

"This is a charmed wallet and a charmed moneybag. The wallet is for muggle money, the bag is for wizarding money. All you do is say the amount that you need and it will be deducted from your vault and put in the wallet or bag. In the wallet there is a muggle driver's license, a health card, a debit card, and two credit cards. Should you decide to change your appearance, the driver's license will reflect the change in the photo. All of the identification is made out to James Black, however if you wish to change that name, just place your thumb on the photo and say the name you wish to use. All of your identification will automatically change to that. Here is also a passport charmed the same way."

Harry grinned, almost matching the goblin in toothiness. "Are you also a mind reader? This is exactly what I need."

"I try my best, sir."

A parchment appeared on his desk and Flickaxe picked it up. "You will be happy to know that the wards have been reset to your personal magical signature. It turns out that there was no one in the house, but shortly after the wards were set, Dumbledore appeared at the front of the house. He was not able to find it. He called in some others, but they also were unable to access the house. Our security goblin reports that they have finally left. Would you like to be escorted

to your vaults now?" He held out the key for the Black family vault.

"No, I can do that later. Right now I just want to go home and think things over. This has been a very stressful morning."

"Very good, sir. Would you like to use my fireplace to floo from? It will allow you to avoid any... unwanted attention."

"I would appreciate that very much," Harry told him. "Flickaxe, may you and your clan prosper and may gold flow like water into your vaults." With that, Harry took a pinch of floo powder, tossed it into the fireplace, stepped in and said, "12 Grimmauld Place!"

12 Grimmauld Place

Harry made his usual ungraceful exit from the fireplace, sneezing at the soot and rolling across the floor to slam against the wall.

"Filthy mudbloods! Traitors! Get out of my house!" The portrait of Mrs. Black began screaming as soon as Harry came to a stop. There was also a sharp pop and the demented house elf, Kreacher, appeared and began cursing him. Harry let it go on a moment, then hissed in Parseltongue.

"SHUT UP!!"

Both Mrs. Black and Kreacher stopped in shock. Harry drew himself to his full height and, in his most theatrical voice, growled at them.

"I am the Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. You will either give me the required respect, or I will banish you from this house, dissolve your marriage ties post-mortem, and erase every trace of you from Black history. And you, ELF, I will send you to wait on muggleborn Hufflepuff students at Hogwarts! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

Kreacher threw himself down on the floor and begged forgiveness while pounding his head into the floor. Mrs. Black, still in shock, curtsied and, smiling coquettishly, apologised to Harry. Apparently, they figured that since Parseltongue was virtually unknown to exist outside dark wizards, that Harry must be the real thing. Harry decided to keep up the charade, at least until he could figure out a way to get rid of these two major neck pains.

"Will you be joining the forces of the Dark Lord, Voldemort?" Mrs. Black was actually simpering, batting her eyes and smiling hideously.

"Do not speak to me of that mongrel! Do you not know that his mother was the daughter of a crazed tramp and his father a filthy muggle?" Harry was having fun with this, seeing the shock on Mrs. Black's face. He did, however feel bad about the racist pureblood crap that he was having to spout. It served his purpose of keeping the portrait off guard however. "Your son would have been better off to have opposed that filth and waited for a REAL Dark Lord, someone from his own house. He would have probably been alive today, rather than slain by one not fit to kiss my shoes."

Mrs. Black almost swooned with excitement, while Kreacher trembled uncontrollably. Harry ordered the elf to prepare a meal for him, nodded a 'good day' to the now smiling portrait, and quickly moved into his old room to avoid laughing out loud at them. He made a point of checking the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black, former Hogwarts Headmaster. Seeing that the old Headmaster was apparently in his frame at Dumbledore's office, Harry took down the frame and locked it in a closet. He then ordered Kreacher to leave it there, explaining that Phineas was magically bound to assist Dumbledore. Harry explained that it was not Phineas' fault, but that Harry did not want Dumbledore to learn of his plans. Kreacher and Mrs. Black hated Dumbledore for his attitudes regarding muggles, muggleborn and mixed blood, so they reluctantly agreed.

That night, Mrs. Black slumbered with dreams of the new Dark Lord

bringing power and respect back to her family, Kreacher slept with dreams of being the head elf of the new Dark Lord, and Harry slept because he was just plain exhausted.

Fortunately, he had no dreams at all.

A/N: And so it begins! How far will Harry go in his quest for respect and peace? Please R&R! The New Dark Lord commands it!

Chapter 2

Truth and Consequences

Harry awoke the next morning feeling better than he had in years. He looked in the closet, but found nothing appropriate to wear for his trip into the seedier side of the wizarding world. Knowing that the Black family was a typical Dark Slytherin trained family, he was sure that there would be appropriate clothes, all he needed was to find them. Putting on his most commanding attitude, he called out, "Kreacher!"

Suddenly appearing, bowing and scraping, the elf asked Harry how he could be of service. Harry looked at him, amused. It was amazing how the little elf's attitude had changed. No longer was acting demented, as Harry had suspected, Kreacher was about as crazy as a fox. The whole insanity thing had been an act. This did not mean that Harry had forgiven his part in the death of Sirius, however he needed every ally he could get this time, even if they were scheming nutters. In retrospect, Harry thought that scheming nutters might be exactly what he needed right now.

"Kreacher, I have need of your service. I wish to go into Knockturn Alley today, but I do not want to be recognized. I have not found any appropriate clothes for that purpose. I wish for you to rectify that situation. I will also require breakfast, nothing too heavy. After I have eaten, I will have additional assignments for you. Make no mistake, if you fail, I will not be forgiving, but should you serve me loyally, there will be great rewards. Lord Black rewards loyalty. And that is another thing. I shall no longer be referred to inside this house as anything but 'Lord Black' or 'My Lord'. 'Lord Potter-Black' will also be acceptable, however it is not my first choice. Please notify all of the family portraits of this policy. Say nothing to Phineas however until we can free him from the spells placed upon him by Hogwarts. Is this understood?"

Kreacher's eyes, if anything, got even bigger than Harry would have

thought possible. Here was a master he could serve joyfully! He was practically wiggling like a puppy as he bowed and scraped before Harry. "It shall be done immediately, My Lord!" With a pop, he disappeared, only to reappear mere moments later, buried under a mass of robes. He quickly laid them out on Harry's bed, then left as quickly as he had appeared.

Harry collapsed on the bed, laughing. By acting as Kreacher and Mrs. Black wished him to act, he had gained them as allies. For the first time, he began to see the wisdom of the Sorting Hat when it wanted to place him into Slytherin. Had he not been influenced initially by that idiot Malfoy and Ron, he would probably not argued with the hat. Slytherin did not necessarily mean evil, but rather cunning. Harry knew that he would need every bit of that cunning just to survive, let alone prosper. He needed to build alliances with powerful people, and not just on the side of Light. The problem with the wizarding world was that they refused to recognize any shades of grey. You were either Light or Dark and neither would associate with the other, even at the risk of losing their entire way of life. Harry thought that because he was heir to both a Light and a Dark family, he would be able to bridge that gap. He would need a lot of help, and a lot of training.

Recovering from his laughing spell, Harry looked at the robes that Kreacher had brought him. Picking one up, he tried it on, then looked at himself in the mirror. He was amazed at what he saw. Staring back at him was not Harry Potter, but rather a disreputable looking dishwater blond, hook nosed person. The robe obviously had a glamour spell placed upon it. He quickly tried on the other robes. Each one had a different face attached to it. There were even robes which turned his appearance into that of a witch rather than a wizard. Harry's face split into a wide grin. It was at that moment that Kreacher reappeared to tell Harry that his breakfast was ready.

Bowing low, the little elf inquired, "Master is pleased?"

"Kreacher, you have outdone yourself. I will overlook you addressing me as 'Master' rather than 'My Lord'.... This time." The elf trembled and banged his head against the floor. Harry let him do that for two reasons. The first was that he still had a bit of residual anger toward the elf, although that was quickly going away. The second reason was more important. Kreacher expected him to act that way, and would have been suspicious otherwise.

"Enough. I am going to go eat now." Harry left the room and went down to the kitchen. Although he could tell that Kreacher had really tried to please him on his meal, he quickly came to the conclusion that Kreacher was not a very good cook. This was something that he would have to change, and quickly. Finishing up, he left the kitchen and went to the portrait of Mrs. Black.

"Lady Black, I require your wisdom and service." Shocked, the portrait quickly recovered and, curtsying deeply, pledged her assistance.

"I require a staff of house elves suitable for this Most Ancient and Noble house, but I do not want to obtain them through official channels. I also require a new wand, one that cannot be traced or monitored by the Ministry. I should control them, not the other way around."

Mrs. Black swelled with pride. Not only had the Heir, the new Lord Black recognized her with the title of "Lady", something her worthless husband and sons had never done, he had also shown respect for her wisdom instead of treating her as some mindless female good for nothing but breeding. It was at this moment that the portrait decided that she would serve this Lord and, as hard as it was for her, forget the fact that he not only had Light wizards in his bloodline, but also the mudblood taint. "It must have been an accident at the hospital. He **MUST** be a pureblood Dark wizard, accidentally switched at birth. That means that some poor pureblood family is suffering with a blood traitor's whelp. Oh well, their loss, our gain!"

"Certainly, My Lord. I realize that Kreacher is an awful cook, but there has not been much call for it. He is a wonderful administrator elf however, loyal to a fault to those who show their worthiness. Let him choose your staff. The Black family has always had unofficial channels we could go through. He will be discreet, just tell him what you want and he will do it. As far as the wand, you will need to go to Knockturn Alley and see the other Mr. Ollivander. He and his brother had a falling out some 50 years ago and split their partnership. His wands are well built, powerful and made without meddling from the ministry. Every Dark family uses him for their untraceable wands. He is also a better wandmaker than his brother. Any wand over 50 years old in his brother's shop was crafted by him."

"Excellent. I knew that I could count on you. I have one other thing that we need to speak about. This will require every bit of patience and cunning that you possess." Seeing her puzzled look, Harry continued. "I have needs to build alliances, even if they are temporary. This will require me to interact with people I would rather destroy than work with. It will even require me to act as their host occasionally. I know your delicate sensibilities..." At this, Harry gave an inward snort of amusement. "Regarding polluted blood and blood traitors. I will need you to put on your best, most gracious attitude toward these mongrels. They are part of my plan and I can always dispose of them later, once I have achieved my goals. We can always have the house elves disinfect the areas that they have touched."

Mrs. Black looked slightly scandalized, but nodded her agreement. Now HERE was a Dark Lord who would have been a natural Slytherin. As if reading her thoughts, Harry told her that the hat had originally wanted to place him into Slytherin, but it would not have served his ultimate goal. Mrs. Black thought that this made her Lord even more cunning than she had originally believed.

"I will do as you ask, but may I suggest an even better remedy? I

have, as part of my inheritance, a manor house left to me by my father. No one knows of it, and it was not included in the Black Family holdings. I had meant to hand it over to my husband, but my mother advised against it, just in case I needed a place to escape to should the marriage fall apart. The deed has been signed, and it is hidden under the top drawer of the dresser in my room. It is yours, My Lord. You are my Heir as well as the Black Heir. My will has never been opened or read, it is located with the deed. It does not name you specifically, it just leaves everything to the Head of the House of Black."

"Lady Black, I am honored that you have entrusted this to me. I shall use it wisely. It will keep the undesirables out of this house, something upon which we both desire." With that, Harry bowed to the portrait and went into the study, inwardly doing a silly mental dance, something which would not have impressed either Mrs. Black or Kreacher. Speaking of Kreacher....

"Kreacher! I require you!" The house elf appeared immediately.

"Yes Mas... Lord Black? How can Kreacher serve you?" Harry did not call him on the whole 'Master' mistake, old habits for old elves must be very hard to break.

"Kreacher, I have spoken with the Mistress, Lady Black. She suggested that I have you choose a suitable staff of house elves through 'unofficial' channels to serve this Most Ancient and Noble house. I also want a full staff for Lady Black's manor house." Seeing Kreacher's puzzled look, Harry informed him of the documents in Mrs. Black's room and instructed Kreacher to obtain them for him. Kreacher disappeared and returned moments later with the parchments. Harry looked them over and put them in an inside pocket of his robe. He made plans to visit the house at the earliest possible moment. He fixed his gaze upon Kreacher and gave an inward sigh. He would prefer to keep Kreacher more or less out of the loop, however at this point, he did not have many options.

"Kreacher, I name you my chief elf. You shall be my representative in dealings with the staff. I will require skilled cooks, kitchen workers and cleaning elves. I want this house and the manor house returned to their former glory. Is this within your capabilities?"

Kreacher pulled himself up with more pride than he had ever seen in a house elf. "It shall be done as you require. I pledge myself to your purposes, My Lord." At this, the filthy rag that Kreacher had been wearing faded away, to be replaced with a brilliant uniform resembling that of a doorman for a high society hotel. Kreacher disappeared and reappeared going down on one knee and holding out a large signet ring.

"This is the signet ring of the Head of the House of Black. You will need to write your instructions down and use the ring to seal them with wax. This way Kreacher can access the family vault to pay for your purchases and the binding of the staff."

Harry took the ring, placed it on his finger, then wrote out his instructions and sealed the parchment. Kreacher bowed deeply and disappeared to do Harry's bidding. Harry had purposely signed the parchment, not with the name 'Harry Potter', but rather with just the title, 'Lord Black'. Although Dumbledore was undoubtedly aware that he was now Lord Black, he would just as soon keep the rest of the wizarding world guessing. He had several things to do before he could come out in the open.

It was funny how things worked out. When he had slipped into Gringotts the previous day, his intention was to empty his trust vault and disappear into the muggle world, possibly fleeing overseas to make a new life for himself and just let the wizarding world sink in its own corruption. He even had plans to let Voldemort know that he was out of the game and just pitch the rest of the ingrates over the side. Seeing Dumbledore in Flickaxe's office however, made him realize that, like it or not, he had a responsibility. Harry decided that

Voldemort would never allow him to just leave, that he would always be looking over his shoulder for Death Eaters and other enemies. He also realized just how much he wanted the people who had used, abused and manipulated him over the years to pay, starting with the Dursleys.

Harry looked over the different glamour robes, finally settling on one which made him appear to be about 30 years old, with an arrogant pureblood appearance. The glamour had shoulder length sandy brown hair, tied back in a ponytail, a diamond stud in one ear and an eye patch. Harry realized that with the glamour, his eyeglasses did not show, and even though the patch covered one eye, he could see perfectly well through it. He decided to, as soon as possible, either obtain contact lenses, or even better, laser surgery to correct his vision. He wanted to change his appearance on a more permanent basis so that he would not be constantly gawked at. He then put the robes over his oversized hand-me-down muggle clothing. Going downstairs and bidding Mrs. Black good-bye, he went to the fireplace and floo'ed directly to Gringotts.

When Harry walked up to the security goblin, the goblin smiled and asked him if he wanted to speak to his account manager. Seeing Harry's confused look, the goblin explained that the security measures of Gringotts could see through any type of glamour spell. They could also not be fooled by polyjuice or muggle style makeup. Identity theft was not a problem at this bank.

Once Harry had been escorted into Flickaxe's office, he handed over Mrs. Black's will and the deed to the manor house. He grinned at the shocked look on the goblin's face. Harry had never seen a goblin flummoxed before, and he was thoroughly enjoying it.

"Well, well... This is a surprise. We have been looking for this will for quite a while. Even though Walburga, Sirius' mother was a Black by birth she was a second cousin to her husband. The two branches of the family had quite a bit of distrust for each other, so it would make

sense that she would hold her property separately. Unfortunately, other than this property and some family heirlooms and personal effects, her side of the line was pretty poor. They had some very bad investments over the years, not to mention a bit of family embezzlement."

Harry thought a bit. "In that case, please move her assets into the main Black family vault and close out her old vault. No sense wasting space."

"May I suggest a different solution? Keep her vault and move all the non-monetary items into it from your other vaults. It is quite a large vault, with a very prestigious location, very near to your other vaults. We can, however close your trust account vault and move that money into your other vault. It is a newer vault that would be useful for us as a new account vault."

"Sounds good to me. I would also like an audit of all items in my vaults. Anything that has been removed illegally must, I repeat, must be returned. I am not contesting the money that Dumbledore took as a stipend for my muggle relatives, I will deal with that in a different manner, however if he took anything else that he should not have, I require it to be returned."

Flickaxe grinned. "It just so happens that he has removed many small objects from the Potter family vault over the years. Your Grandfather was quite the inventor, and he made several objects and knick-knacks which he patented but never marketed. It seemed that if it whirred, spun, or ticked, he had a hand in creating it."

Harry thought back to when he had become a one-wizard wrecking crew in Dumbledore's office. "Oh, great. I probably destroyed all of the things that Dumbledore removed."

"Not by a long shot. We recovered the damaged items and repaired them, but there are several things left that he appropriated. As we

speak, they are being returned to your vault."

Harry imagined what Dumbledore's expression might be as his ill gotten booty was disappearing from his office. This was such a great mental picture that he shared it with Flickaxe. The goblin grinned and flipped a switch on his desk. What appeared to be a large screen television appeared on the wall of the office and Harry saw Dumbledore scrambling around his desk, grabbing objects only to have them disappear from his hands. When the last Potter property had been reclaimed, the office was much more bare. A parchment appeared on the desk with the Gringotts seal. Dumbledore noticed it, opened it and scanned the contents, then screamed with rage. The picture went black and the television disappeared back into a recess in the wall.

"What was in that parchment that set him off like that?"

"I just notified him that your property had been reclaimed, and that all of the damaged property that we recovered was repaired by our master crafts-goblins, with the repair bills charged against his vault. Since he was holding them without your permission, it was his responsibility to keep them safe, even against you."

The goblin then got very serious. "I have one other thing that you must know. It is information which we just received and has to do with your mother. You have been raised believing that your mother was a muggleborn, correct?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"That information was incorrect. Your mother and her squib sister were adopted at a very early age by Mr. And Mrs. Marcus Evans. She was placed with them by Albus Dumbledore following the deaths of her natural parents. The Evans had knowledge of the magical world, that is why they were so supportive when she received her Hogwarts letter."

Harry growled. "Will the infernal meddling of Dumbledore follow me forever? Who then were their natural parents?"

"Lily and Petunia's natural parents were Cassius Prewitt and Amanda Weasley. They were siblings of the parents of Arthur and Molly Weasley. It was believed that their daughters perished with them. Dumbledore however was believed when he reported that the children were dead. Because of the adoption, they never had any claim on the estates of either wizarding family."

"So, the Weasleys are my, what, cousins?"

"Yes, although they do not know it. Albus Dumbledore has manipulated them just as he has every one of his supporters. Have you never noticed the resemblance between your mother's picture and Ginny Weasley?"

"Sure I have, but I never really thought much about it. I always kind of chalked it up to that old song about being attracted to a gal just like the one that married dear old Dad."

"Well, Ginny Weasley is a carbon copy of her mother at that age, who was remarkably similar in looks to Dorothea Prewitt, Molly's great grandmother. Your mother also got her looks from Dorothea."

"Well Flickaxe, I must say that you have given me a lot to digest. I have some other business to attend to, so I must bid you good-bye for today."

"A pleasure Lord Black. I see that is what you prefer to be called, so I will do so. To get to your new manor house by floo, just name your destination as "Walburga's House. Floo is the only way to access it at this time."

With that, the goblin and the wizard shook hands, blessed each other

with long life and rivers of gold, then Harry left.

Going quickly to Knockturn Alley, Harry made his way to the wand shop. It was not advertised as such, and had Harry not known what to look for, he would have missed it. Entering, he was greeted by the owner, a wizard who looked to be a twin of the man he purchased his wand from. Harry got right down to business.

"I require a new wand, one that will not be a direct line to the Ministry. The wand that I now use also has some properties which make it unsuitable for some uses."

"May I see your wand?" Harry handed it over and Ollivander stiffened.

"Sir, while my brother remembers every wand he ever sold, I remember every wand I have ever made. This is one of them. I sold its brother to a young Slytherin student over 50 years ago. That student did great and terrible things with it. My brother told me to whom he sold this one, Mr. Po..."

"Lord Black, if you please." Harry said this with all of the authority he could muster. "I am the Heir of not only the Most Noble and Ancient House of Potter, but also the Heir of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Black. If you must, you may think of me as Lord Potter-Black, but you will never speak my name to anyone else. Is that understood? I insist that all my dealings be confidential. Make no mistake, I do not suffer fools or people who cannot keep their mouths shut."

Ollivander did not see the teenage Harry Potter, he only saw the imposing figure of the glamour that the robes provided. "Y-yes, sir. Let me find you a suitable wand."

Twenty minutes later, Harry had a wand which, if possible, worked even better than his Ministry registered wand. It was also Holly, but

had the feather of a Black Phoenix instead of the one from Fawkes. It had the added attraction of having no Ministry registration as well as no tracking charm. Before he left, Ollivander had one further suggestion.

"Lord Black, should you like, I can remove the tracking charm from your old wand. You mentioned that you were emancipated; there should be no reason that the Ministry should have any business tracking your magic."

Harry had not thought of that. It did make things much easier. "Make it so." The charm removed, Harry paid Ollivander roughly triple what he had paid his brother for the original wand, then made a quick exit.

Leaving Knockturn Alley, Harry went to Madam Malkin's robe shop in Diagon Alley. Taking off his robe, he instructed her to put the insignia of both the House of Black and the House of Potter on the breast. He also ordered 6 sets of dress robes in various colour combinations as well as everyday robes. He paid for them from his money bag and told her that his elf would pick them up.

Slipping on his invisibility cloak, Harry left Diagon Alley and entered Muggle London. He removed his cloak and caught a cab to Herrod's department store. Using the credit card, he purchased a decent muggle wardrobe, everyday clothes, workout gear and a couple of high quality suits in the event that he needed to blend into a crowd. He then went to a wireless store and purchased a cell phone. He had no idea who he was going to call, but figured that he would find some use for it. He had one stop left to make before returning home.

Catching a taxi to a used car lot, Harry purchased a nondescript Cooper Mini, a car that would blend in with the lower income neighbourhood of Grimmauld Place. He would have preferred to purchase a new sports car, but anyone such as an Auror or Order member would have expected that. He also was tired of calling taxis and waiting until they came to him. Regular taxis arriving with

regularity at his residence could also tip off unwelcome watchers to his location. So he purchased the Mini and, by trial and error, learned how to drive it on the way home. Fortunately this did not include the striking of other cars or pedestrians, so Harry figured out that he was coming out ahead in the deal.

Chapter 3

Old and New Business

4 Privet Drive

Harry had finally figured out how to solve the problem of keeping the selected glamour while still wearing muggle clothing. Even though he did not know the charm for the glamour, he could transfigure clothes into different shapes. He simply took the robes, and with his new muggle clothing as a guide, made the robes match. He had become quite attached to his Lord Black persona that he had worn to Knockturn Alley, that of the sandy haired 30 year old. He was now dressed in tan dockers, a dark blue polo shirt, and Italian loafers.

As Harry pulled up in front of the Dursley house, the hairs at the back of his neck stood straight up. A masked Death Eater stepped out of the house and fired the spell to place the Dark Mark above the house. Harry stuck his wand out the window of the Mini and stupefied him. Jumping out of the car, he closed the distance to the dazed Death Eater, drew back his leg and gave a solid kick to the man's temple. Harry heard a distinct crack, and the Death Eater went limp. Harry grabbed the man's wand and snapped it, then stepped cautiously inside the house.

Petunia was dead, her blood and entrails smeared all over the entrance hall. Dudley and Vernon were hiding behind the couch, one at each end, and an insanely laughing Death Eater was firing spells at any body part that became exposed, all while mocking them in a little girl voice. She never realized that Harry was in the room until he stuck his wand at the base of her skull. As she froze, Harry plucked her wand out of her hand.

"Hi Bella. Did you just happen to be in the neighbourhood and decide

to drop in and slaughter some pigs for Voldemort's breakfast bacon? I mean, you can tell Tom thanks for the favor, but I was really planning to take care of this myself."

"Potter! I just killed your aunt, and was about to kill your uncle and cousin, and its alright with you? Damn, you take all the fun out of this job!"

"Whoops, he's getting away." Harry stunned Dudley before he could break free, then did the same to Vernon. "How about some ideas, Bella? You know my crucio really sucks, and it is not really inventive enough anyway. I was thinking about dressing them in pillowcases and making them work under my house elves until they have paid back every knut they stole from me over the years. And paying them at one half the wage of the elves. What's half of nothing?"

"You've changed". Bella looked at Harry in admiration. Why don't you join forces with the Dark Lord? You know he has offered before."

"Bella, it will be a cold day in Hell before I, Lord Potter-Black, bows before that half blood mongrel. He talks a good game, but he is out for nothing but his own power. It would be much better for you to rethink your loyalties."

"But you are a half blood yourself!"

"No, I am the Head of the Most Noble and Ancient Houses of Black and Potter, son of James Potter and the adopted pureblood witch Lily Prewitt. Dumbledore stole her from our world and let her be raised by muggles without her family's knowledge. I am also the Godson and Heir of Sirius Black. By the way, I forgive you his death, I saw that you were only throwing stunners at him." It almost killed Harry to say this, but he was determined to undermine Voldemort's base any way possible.

Confusion was in Bella's face. She wanted to believe, but she could

not. Harry took her face in his hands and drew her into a passionate kiss. He felt like throwing up, but it was all he could think of at the time. When he drew back, Bella had a dazed look on her face. In her eyes, she had not been kissing the 16 year old Harry, but rather the 30 year old persona that the glamour put forth.

"Now go to your boss and tell him that he should contact me in his usual manner tonight. I will send your wand back to you by owl when I get home. I plan on taking care of this trash myself."

Dudley and Vernon were coming to. Harry transfigured the couch into a large wardrobe cabinet, large enough for the two to fit in. He growled at them. "The only chance that you have to live is to get in that cabinet and close the doors. Otherwise I will give this lady back her wand and let her finish what she started."

The two Dursleys scrambled into the wardrobe. Harry locked it, then tapped it with his wand, shrinking it (and them) into a package about the size of a deck of playing cards. He then stuck the package in his pants pocket. He turned to Bella and motioned toward the door.

"Lord Black?"

"Yes?"

"I don't know if the Dark Lord will kill you or not, but I have to say that you have a lot of class." With that, she Apparated away. Harry got into his car and left before the neighbors arrived.

Minutes later, there was a series of pops and aurors began appearing in the street in front of the house. They looked inside, cleaned everything up, removed the bodies of Petunia and the Death Eater, then left the neighbourhood looking as if nothing had ever happened.

Harry was whistling when he entered the door at 12 Grimmauld

Place. He had stopped at a pharmacy and purchased the strongest mouthwash they had so he could cleanse his mouth after the kiss he gave Bella. He drew up short at the portrait of Walburga Black. Giving the portrait a small nod, he greeted her.

"Good afternoon, Lady Black."

"My Lord, you appear to be in a very good humour this day."

"Oh, I am," Harry replied honestly. "I am about to enslave a pair of muggles to work under the house elves in restoring your manor house. I know they are not very efficient, but they owe me not only a life debt, but they have been stealing from me for the past 15 years. I figure they should work off their debt in about 80 years or so."

Mrs. Black blinked. She had expected many things from the new Lord Black, but she had no idea that he would be this progressive! Muggle slaves, this could become a trend. Possibly use them as butlers, they appeared to be almost human. Some liberal wizards objected to enslaving magical creatures like house elves, this could be a real breakthrough!

"Wonderful idea, My Lord! Is it anyone you know?"

"Actually, yes. It is the muggle son and husband of my blood traitor squib aunt. She, unfortunately was killed before I could get to her. Remember Bellatrix? She was the one I rescued them from."

"Oh, yes, Bella. Such a sweet girl. It is a shame she is still working for the False Lord. I suppose that could change someday though."

"Yeah", thought Harry. "When the Dementors suck out what little soul she has left." Nodding at Mrs. Black, Harry went into the parlour and summoned Kreacher.

"Yes, My Lord?"

Harry took the wardrobe out of his pocket and cancelled the glamour on his clothes. He put his finger on his lips in the universal 'shhh' sign and winked at Kreacher. He then 'accio'ed' his most impressive dress robes with the crests of Potter-Black and slipped them on. The final touch was to unshrink the wardrobe and, with a flick of his wand, open the doors, spilling Dudley and Vernon out on the floor. Kreacher gasped.

Seeing Harry, Vernon got over his fear and went straight to rage, charging at Harry, fists clenched. Kreacher waved a hand at him and he was thrown back violently into the wall. Dudley curled up and whimpered.

"Muggle filth! How DARE you attack the mighty Lord Black! My Lord, do you want Kreacher to dismember this animal?"

"No, Kreacher, I have much better plans for them. Turning a glacial glare on Vernon, Harry pointed at him like the skeleton of death, chilling Vernon's very soul. "You owe me your very life. I saved you from the Death Eater who killed your wife. She actually thought that I might have feelings for you and that your death's would hurt me. She was wrong on both counts. Not only did you abuse and assault me for 15 years, you also took £540,000 meant for my support and then starved me and told me that I was a burden on your family. You made me your personal slave while you were stealing the money that my parents left for my care. It is repayment time. You will become my servants, working under my chief elf, Kreacher. You will treat him as your superior, since the lowest house elf is superior to your form of life. You will wear the uniform of the Potter-Black house elves and do what you are told until you debt is paid. This is the only option if you wish to live. Otherwise I give you back to Bella to finish what she started."

Vernon and Dudley hung their heads, then nodded in defeat. Kreacher grinned evilly, then turned to Harry. "My Lord Black,

Kreacher is afraid that he has no house elf uniform large enough for the new servants."

"Well, can't you adjust the size? I am sure that is a simple task for a house elf of your caliber."

"Oh, yes Lord, I just wanted to get your approval." At Harry's quizzical look, Kreacher snapped his fingers and shrunk Dudley and Vernon down to the size of the smallest house elf on the staff. Another snap and their muggle clothes were gone, replaced by filthy tea cozies. Harry stared in shock and....amusement. He thought that Kreacher would make larger clothes, not smaller muggles. It was fitting though. If only some of Voldemort's Death Eaters could receive this kind of treatment, they might change some of their views.

"Muggles must come with Kreacher now. Lord Black is a busy wizard, and Kreacher is assigning muggles to pull weeds in Lord Black's manor house gardens. Worthless muggles will have an easy day, there is only 50 acres of gardens to weed out, if muggles will work like house elves, it should be done by tonight."

Chuckling as Kreacher and the new House muggles left, Harry summoned an owl to return Bella's wand.

Harry went to his room that night knowing that Voldemort would be sending him a nightmare. Harry decided not to sleep, but rather practice meditation so that he would not be caught unawares. He had been reading a book earlier on zen methods, and realized that this might be a way to clear his mind like Snape had suggested in the 'lessons' on Occlumency on which Dumbledore had insisted.

He knew that he had succeeded two hours later when the vision of Voldemort torturing Bella came across his mind. There were also innocent muggles being tortured, however Harry did not break down as he had previously. He felt sad, but the corner of his mind that held rational thoughts whispered to him that there was nothing that he

could do about it, and that he bore no responsibility for Voldemort's actions.

"POTTER! Your messenger girl says that you want to speak with me. Are you ready to submit to me as your Lord and Master?"

"Not bloody likely Tom. Why should a true pureblood Lord bow down to a half blooded mongrel with delusions of adequacy? Especially when you are torturing your own followers to the point where they will begin to desert you in droves to come to me? Take Bella for example. Fanatically loyal to you, spent a decade in Azkaban waiting for your return, never denied you even at the trial. Unlike Malfoy who claimed that he was under the Imperious Curse and really didn't want anything to do with you. Malfoy answered your call out of fear and greed, Bella came to you out of slavish loyalty. How long before they begin to see your obvious flaws and begin to come to me? They know the first part of the prophecy, that I have the power to defeat you." Harry mentally crossed his fingers hoping that Voldemort would not be able to tell he was lying about this next part. "But while you are desperately trying to find out the last part of the prophecy, I could care less. I may have the power to defeat you, I may have power that you know not, but....what if I decide not to use it?"

Harry could feel Voldemort's shock. The Dark Lord turned and released Bella from her pain while he attempted to formulate a reply.

"You marked me as your equal, thinking that I was also a half breed. You bypassed the obvious pure blood. But you made a mistake. I am not a half breed. I am a pureblood, and as such, I hold power that you know not, legitimate power in the wizarding government. I hold the right to two seats in the Wizengamot, that of Lord Black and Lord Potter. I also have more money than Malfoy, your wealthiest supporter. Should he come to me, and rest assured, when he finds out that you are a mongrel and I am the pureblood, he will come around, then you will not have either the financial support or the support of the purebloods for your fight. Your little rebellion will wither and die on the

vine. I am not your equal....I am your superior!"

Mentally crossing his fingers again, Harry sent back waves of pure hostility. "Dumbledore says that love is the power you know not. In that case, we are equals. The people who were supposed to nurture and protect us used and manipulated us to their own ends. Dumbledore kidnapped my mother to put her with muggles, he did the same thing to me. He stole from me and used me for his own ends, that of destroying you. He should not have bothered, you are doing a great job of destroying yourself. If I was standing next to you with Dumbledore in front of us, I would probably set our differences aside for a few minutes so that we could kill him together. In my humble opinion, the whole love thing is vastly overrated. Should I decide to contest you, I will do it on my terms, not Dumbledore's."

"Potter-Black, you have given me much to think about. I will speak with you again. If you will not serve me, we may still become allies, or at least neutral toward each other." With that, Voldemort retreated from Harry's mind.

Harry returned to reality with a start. What the hell had he just done? This ad-lib playing by ear had just changed the whole dynamics of the battle. Voldemort had hundreds of Death Eaters, Dementors, werewolves and giants. He also had the corrupt government officials turning a blind eye, helping him with their neglect. Harry had a few classmates of questionable loyalty, a load of cash, two unplottable properties, both in terrible condition, an ugly nutter of a portrait and a maniacal house elf. He actually began feeling pretty good about his prospects.

The next morning.

Harry had an appointment at Gringotts to finalize his plans for his mini revolution. Strolling into the bank, he was immediately escorted to Flickaxe's office. When he arrived, there were 2 aurors and Madam Bones, the head of the Magical Law Enforcement Office

waiting for him.

"Thank Merlin you are alright! When we saw the Dark Mark over your aunts house and found her murdered, we feared that you had been kidnapped. What happened to your other relatives? And was it you who killed the Death Eater?"

"Slow down! My remaining relatives are under my... protection. I am keeping them safe until this is over, then I will request an Obliviator to remove all memories of myself and our world. Madam Bones, I admit that I despise them, they abused me and stole from me for 15 years, but they never asked for this war. And yes, I killed the Death Eater, however I did not kill him magically, and it was in self defense. The only spell I threw was a stunner, then I kicked him on my way inside. When I arrived, there was another Death Eater torturing my last remaining relatives. I believe that the surprise scared him off." Harry was amazed at how easily the lies and half truths rolled off his tongue. He would be able to repeat this story under Veritaserum, especially since he had a tiny plastic capsule of the antidote secreted under his tongue, the idea courtesy of a muggle spy movie he had watched recently. The antidote had been extremely expensive, having Kreacher purchase it for him from a underground Potions Master. Harry decided he would hire the man if he could ascertain his loyalties. Hell, if everything went according to plan, he would hire Snape as his personal Potions Master.

One of the aurors was writing down Harry's statement, then Madam Bones asked Harry if he had cast any spells with his wand since that time. When he answered no, she checked it for the last spell cast. Harry's story checked out since he had used the unregistered wand for all of the other spells. She then wanted to know why the tracking spell for underage wizards had been taken off the wand.

"I can answer that, Madam Bones," Flickaxe answered. He presented Madam Bones with the emancipation papers and showed her where they had been duly registered with the Ministry. "Since Mr.

Potter is no longer considered a minor by the Ministry, the tracking spell serves no legal purpose. It was removed as a service." Harry gave an inward snicker. And he thought that he was a good liar. He couldn't hold a candle to a goblin.

"You do know that Albus Dumbledore is attempting to get that emancipation set aside, don't you? He is convening a meeting of the Wizengamot this afternoon at 2 pm."

"That bloody bastard! Madam Bones, in that case, it is time for me to lodge a formal complaint against Dumbledore."

"Formal complaint? What could he have possibly done that would be illegal?" Flickaxe picked up a document case which had been sitting next to his desk and began to pull out parchments. As Madam Bones leaned over and began to read, her face paled.

A/N: At 3200+ words for this chapter, I am going to do the showdown at the Wizengamot in the next chapter. If you like the story, mark it in the alerts. That way you won't have to search for it, it will be delivered to your email when I update.

Hamilton

Chapter 4

Payback

"This session of the Wizengamot is convened for the purpose of setting aside the Declaration of Emancipation in the case of Harry James Potter, minor child of James Potter and Lily Evans. Request for conservatorship has been filed by..."

"Excuse me, point of order." This was from Madam Bones, sitting as Head of the Magical Law Enforcement Office.

"Yes Madam Bones?" Dumbledore was impatient to get the procedures concluded. He was finally going to get his plan for Harry to defeat Voldemort back on track. That and slap down those damned goblins. How DARE they pull that stunt in his office and make him look like a fool.

"According to rule 4798, section (1), subsection (b)(34), the Wizengamot must hear cases dealing with criminal matters prior to hearing civil matters. The MLEO has a sealed indictment handed down just 1 hour ago in regards to several major crimes against the well being and peace of the Wizarding community, the victims being minor children. It would be a grave miscarriage of justice for this case to be continued, the prosecutor and the MLEO believe that the accused perpetrator of these crimes is in a position to add to his crimes against children if he is not apprehended and brought before the bar immediately. We have aurors in place as we speak ready to arrest the suspect and transport him to this court within mere moments."

"By all means, Madam. You are within your rights and the rules of this court to bring this accused miscreant in for reckoning. As Supreme Mugwump, I order the arrest of the suspect and the immediate transportation to the Chair of Judgment." Dumbledore wondered if the MLEO had actually caught one of Voldemort's Death Eaters who

had been torturing children, or if it was some kind of family child abuse case.

"Thank you. Aurors! Take the suspect into custody!" At this point, two aurors who had been stationed behind Dumbledore tapped him on the shoulders with their wands, and he was instantly transported to the Chair of Judgment, the chains magically wrapping themselves around him, effectively binding him to the chair. The gasp heard throughout the courtroom was filled with disbelief. How could a wizard so light that he had a phoenix as a familiar even be accused of crimes which would require a chained chair? The prosecutor, Robert Slagg, came to the podium.

"In cases where the Supreme Mugwump is accused of crimes, Rule 22, section 77 (b) (66) requires the Wizengamot to be headed by the Mugwump Pro Tem, this month's Pro Tem appointment held by Josiah Zambini. Please take the bench, Mugwump Zambini." Josiah Zambini came forward. There were a couple of snickers and a whispered comment about him being the latest member of the "Zambini of the Month Club" in reference to him being the 7th husband of his wife, all of them taking her last name and all of the previous ones having died under mysterious circumstances. All in all though, the members of the Wizengamot were comfortable with the choice. Although the Zambinis were a Dark family, they were undeclared in the war and were known to be fair and honest to a fault.

When Zambini was seated, he took the indictment, unsealed it and began to read. As he browsed through the document, at a couple of points his eyes widened and he muttered an "Oh, my!" under his breath. He then composed himself and, putting on his most neutral face, turned to face Dumbledore.

"Albus Dumbledore, you stand accused of the following crimes. On 5 March 1960, you abducted Lileth Rose Prewitt, also known as Lily Evans-Potter, age 1, a pureblood magical child, and Petunia Daisy

Prewitt, age 3 months, a squib, following the deaths of their parents, and placed the children with a muggle family, Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Evans. You are further accused of concealing the whereabouts of said children from their lawfully named guardians, Andover and Generva Weasley, falsifying records to show that the said children had perished with their parents, depriving said pureblood children of a proper upbringing in a magical pureblood family. On these 8 counts, how do you plea?

"Innocent!"

"There is no legal plea of 'innocent', it is either guilty or not guilty."

"Not guilty."

"Albus Dumbledore, you are also accused of the following counts. On 31 October 1981, you abducted the pureblood minor child, Harry James Potter following the death of his parents, James Potter and Lily Evans-Potter, also known as Lileth Rose Prewitt, and placed said pureblood minor child, against the stated binding wishes of his parents, with a non magical family, depriving him of a proper pureblood magical upbringing. It is further alleged that you neglected said pureblood minor child for 10 years, knowing that said child was being physically and mentally abused by his non magical caretakers simply due to his heritage. You are further accused of concealing the pureblood heritage of said minor child from both the child and his pureblood living relatives, Arthur and Molly Weasley. To these 14 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not Guilty" Sullenly.

"Albus Dumbledore, you also stand accused of conspiring with Barty Crouch, Sr., deceased, former Minister of Magic, to deprive one Sirius Orion Black, pureblood wizard, of his civil rights to trial by the Wizengamot and by Veritaserum in order to prove his innocence in the deaths of James and Lily Potter, a pureblood witch and wizard,

and parents of a minor child, Harry James Potter, pureblood wizard. And the deaths of 12 muggles and the alleged death of Peter Pettigrew, Pureblood Wizard. You are further charged with 12 counts of unlawful imprisonment, one for each year that Sirius Orion Black spent in Azkaban, due to the denial of his civil and Pureblood rights of trial by Wizengamot and Veritaserum. On these 14 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Albus Dumbledore, you further stand accused of concealing evidence gained post facto in the case of Sirius Orion Black, pureblood wizard, which would have vindicated said pureblood wizard following his escape from unlawful imprisonment in Azkaban. On this count, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Albus Dumbledore, you stand accused of defrauding the estate of James and Lily Potter, pureblood wizard and witch, and the inheritance of Harry James Potter of numerous items of value, diverting them for your personal use. You are also accused of embezzlement from the estate of James and Lily Potter, pureblood wizard and witch, of the sum of 2 million Galleon, 3 Sickles, and 4 knuts, during a period of 14 years using 104 transactions. On these 154 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Albus Dumbledore, you are accused of 7 counts of torture in the case of Harry James Potter, minor child, pureblood wizard. It is alleged that you forced the named minor child to undergo Occlumency lessons with one Severus Snape, half blood wizard, a known enemy of both the minor child and his parents. On these 7 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty."

"Albus Dumbledore, you stand accused of denying the civil rights and false imprisonment in the case of Harry James Potter during the month of July of this year by denying him the right of communication with his friends and relatives. You are also accused of interfering with owl post to Harry James Potter and using undue influence on his friends and relatives to deny communication with the minor child. On these 44 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Albus Dumbledore, you are accused of violation of statute 14041, section 1, subsection (v)(iii), Child Protection Act which requires all "Headmasters, teachers, school personnel and medical staff to report suspected child abuse to the proper authorities". The specifics of these 77 counts are as follows: At various times in the past 15 years, you, as headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, were notified by your teaching staff and medical personnel of suspected child abuse against Harry James Potter, minor child, pureblood wizard. It is alleged that you refused to inform the proper authorities of the suspected abuse, allowing it to continue. On these 77 counts, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Albus Dumbledore, you are accused of corruption of your position as Supreme Mugwump of the Wizengamot by calling this session of the Wizengamot with the intention of denying one Harry James Potter, also known as Lord Black, Heir of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Black, and Lord Potter, Heir of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Potter, Pureblood wizard and Emancipated Minor, his civil rights and property by using your influence to have the emancipation of Lord Potter-Black set aside and guardianship of Lord Potter-Black awarded to you. On this count, how do you plea?"

"Not guilty"

"Mr. Prosecutor, are you ready to proceed?"

"I am, Your Mugwumpiness."

"You have the floor"

Over the next 12 hours, the prosecution laid out its case. They called in the goblins and their investigators to present evidence of Dumbledore's guilt. They introduced a parchment trail showing the timeline of every count of which the old wizard was accused. Witnesses included Molly and Arthur Weasley, Minerva McGonagall, all of the Weasley children, including Percy, who had attempted to warn others about Dumbledore. There was also Snape, Hermione, Neville, and Arabella Figg. When the evidence of Harry's blood relationship with the Weasleys was introduced and verified, Molly Weasley broke down crying, then she and Arthur had to be removed from the court for threatening life of Dumbledore. Hermione Granger, no longer the Dumbledore-worshipping sycophant, gave her testimony about the Headmaster using his influence on her and Harry's other friends while fixing Dumbledore with a scathing glare. At the end of the testimony, Zambini turned to Dumbledore.

"Will the defendant testify under the influence of Veritaserum?"

"Yes I will." This brought a gasp to the court, and people began to wonder if maybe the whole thing had been a huge mistake. After all, you couldn't possibly lie under the influence. The prosecutor stood up again.

"Sir, there is one thing that I would like to point out prior to the Defendant's testimony. I have a signed statement from Professor Severus Snape, Hogwarts Potions Master, that he was requested by the defendant on numerous occasions to brew antidote for Veritaserum and place the antidote in small, muggle made, plastic

capsules." Harry was shocked. He thought that idea was his alone. Madam Bones suddenly pointed her wand at Dumbledore and stupefied him. The auror standing next to Dumbledore pried his mouth open and removed a small, crushed blue capsule from between his teeth.

Zambini gave an amused look. "It appears that the defendant had plans to stack the deck just a tad." Calling on Severus Snape, he asked how long the effect of the antidote would last.

"No more than 20 minutes."

"Very well, the defendant will be searched for any more contraband and this court will adjourn for one hour. At that time, the defendant will undergo Veritaserum."

"I withdraw my request for Veritaserum, Your Honor!" Dumbledore shouted out.

"Too late, Albus. Aurors, stay with the prisoner."

Exactly one hour later, the Veritaserum was administered, and Dumbledore confirmed every bit of the prosecution's assertions with the exception of 14 counts. It turned out that at the time of those 14 counts, the Child Protection Act had not yet been passed, thereby making his non-reporting a moot point. The remainder of the counts stood however. At the end of the testimony, Zambini called for a vote. The vote to convict on all counts (other than the 14 dropped counts) was unanimous, Light wizards and witches, disgusted by their standard bearer's crimes stood shoulder to shoulder with the Dark Wizards and witches for the first time in over 500 years.

"Albus Dumbledore, stand and face this court." The chains were removed from the chair and Dumbledore stood.

"It is the decision of this court that you receive the following

punishment for your misdeeds. You are hereby stripped of all titles, offices and awards and your seat in this body vacated. All of your property shall be given in restitution to your victims and their estates. The estates in question are those of Lily Potter, nee Prewitt-Evans, Petunia Dursley, nee Prewitt-Evans, Sirius Orion Black. Since Petunia Dursley was implicated in the abuse and shown to be guilty by a preponderance of the evidence, her award shall be given over to her victim, Harry James Potter. The award shall be as follows. To the estate of Lily Potter, 25 . To the estate of Petunia Dursley, 25. To the estate of Sirius Orion Black, 25. The remainder of your restitution shall be awarded to Harry James Potter. Since Mr. Potter is the sole surviving heir of both the Potter and Black estates, and since Petunia Dursley's award has been forfeited to him, he shall receive 100 of the amount of restitution. The order has been signed and filed with Gringotts and your property seized." Suddenly Dumbledore's robe disappeared, leaving him in a pair of grey boxer shorts. "When I said ALL of your assets, I meant ALL." There was a nervous laugh through the court. "Your monetary sentence has been carried out. I also sentence you to 17 life sentences, to be served consecutively. As you are close to the end of your natural life, this court has made special arrangements. You shall be stripped of your magical core and a soul tracker placed upon you. Your memories of your crimes shall be duplicated and stored in 16 sealed penseives. In the event that you undergo reincarnation, a penseive shall be opened and the memories returned to you. That incarnation shall be stripped of its magical core, should it have one, and shall be returned to penal custody for the remainder of its natural life. This shall continue until your 17 life sentences are fulfilled. Do you have any last words to this court?"

"Yes I do. I do not believe that I will be staying around for all of this. Fawkes!" Dumbledore held out his hand to recreate his exit from Hogwarts the previous year. This time however, Fawkes did not do his part. Granted, he did fly over and land on Dumbledore's arm, but instead of flaming away, he looked him in the eye, then turned around very deliberately and faced away from him. He lifted up his

tail and squirted a stream of excrement directly at Dumbledore's face, then flew roughly 2 metres away before flaming out of the room, leaving Dumbledore amazed, confused, and very messy.

"It appears that you will be the guest of the penal system after all. And for a very long time. Aurors, do your duty." The aurors pointed their wands at Dumbledore, bound him and disappeared away. Zambini then banged his gavel.

"If there is no more business.." Just then, a wizard in a white wig and robes stood up.

"There is one more item of business."

"And who might you be?"

"I am George Steinman, Solicitor for Harry James Potter-Black, pureblood wizard and Heir of the Most Noble and Ancient Houses of Potter and Black. My client is here to claim his rights as Heir to these Houses and claim his Seat and his two votes in this august body. He declares and claims his lawful title as Lord Potter-Black. He also declares that his names shall be Lord Potter, Lord Black or Lord Potter-Black. My client declares that they shall be interchangeable."

"Very well said. Lord Potter-Black, Please rise."

Harry stood up. He was dressed in silvery grey robes with the crests of the Potter and Black Houses on his breast, the Potter crest to the right of the Black crest. His robes were trimmed on the hem, front, collar and sleeves with two simple stripes, one black, one white. On his left hand, he had the signet ring of the House of Black, on his right, the House of Potter. He had a minor glamour on his face which made him appear to be a couple of years older. Harry strode to the middle of the room.

"Lord Potter-Black, we accept your petition to join this body and claim

your votes. We reaffirm your emancipation and invite you as a brother to join magic. Please hold up your wand." Harry did so. "Do you, Lord Potter-Black, vow to uphold the honor of this august body, protect and defend the wizarding world against all enemies, from within or without?"

"I, Lord Potter-Black, do so vow." At that moment, a golden light shot out of Harry's wand and connected with similar lights coming out of the uplifted wands of every other member. They formed a golden dome over the head of Harry, then retreated.

"Lord Potter-Black, since you are Heir to Houses both Light and Dark, please choose your seat." Harry had watched the members of the court and seen that members of Dark houses sat on the left side, while members of Light houses sat on the right, with a wide aisle between them. He took his wand, levitated the chair they had prepared for him, then placed it firmly between the two in the very front row.

There was a stunned silence. Then a single person began to clap, slowly and deliberately. Harry could not tell which side it was coming from, but it was quickly picked up on. Two, three, a dozen, then every member of the Wizengamot was getting to their feet, clapping, slowly and deliberately, then rising in speed. There came cheers from the gallery as Harry climbed the stairs and walked down the aisle, shaking hands with wizards from both sides, finally claiming his seat.

Phase 2 was complete.

A/N: There you go, folks, one spanking delivered! I am almost tempted to end this one here and write a sequel, but I would like your opinion. Should I continue this one or serialize it? PM me or put it in the reviews!

Chapter 5

Interrupted Plans

Black Manor, Kent

Harry stood by the window in his study, overlooking the gardens. There were 25 acres of assorted flowers and 25 acres of Charm Roses. Those would bloom year round in whatever colour he wanted them to. They were keyed to the mood of the owner. Right now, they ranged in colour from black to yellow, a confusing explosion of colour. But then again, Harry was feeling pretty confused today.

He should have been quite happy, since he had received his O.W.L. results by post this morning. He opened it and found that he had passed with 10 O.W.L.s, only failing Divination and History of Magic. He even received an O in Potions! However there was a small note from Minerva McGonagall asking to see him at his earliest convenience. He had gone to the fireplace and floo'ed her office.

After greeting her, he continued his trip through the floo, arriving in his normal ungraceful manner. Picking himself up, he dusted off his robe, then turned to her. "What did you need to see me about, Professor?"

"Lord Black, you probably noticed that I did not include a list of electives with your O.W.L. results." She seemed a bit on edge.

"Please professor, call me Harry. I feel weird when you, of all people call me by my title." Harry had a feeling that this conversation was starting out on the wrong foot and he wanted to make it a bit more comfortable.

"Only if you call me Minerva. You are, after all, legally recognized as an adult."

"Fair enough. Minerva."

McGonagall fretted for a moment, then looked at Harry. "Harry, you don't know how hard it is for me to have this conversation. I am not ready for this job, I thought that I would have a bit more time before I would have to step into this office. I also thought that I would have Albus' advice, since about the only time anyone ever leaves here is when they die."

Harry looked at the wall where Albus Dumbledore's portrait should be. He was surprised to see that it was not there. He knew that it had been painted, it should have been there, but slumbering, since he was still alive. Minerva followed his gaze.

"We took it down. After the trial, the picture changed to show him sleeping in his Azkaban cell, dressed in prison uniform. This is the greatest disgrace that Hogwarts has ever faced. And because I and the other professors followed him blindly, it is the biggest disgrace that we have ever faced. Hagrid, who you know was Dumbledore's biggest supporter, and in more ways than one, resigned his post the day of the trial and left to join Madam Maxine in France. Severus Snape is in hiding from V-Voldemort right now. He is of no use as a spy anymore since he has no real reason to stay at the school. Only Albus' protection and proximity made him an attractive spy for the other side. Now Vol- Tom Riddle just wants him to be a potions Master and Death Eater. Severus does not want to be Riddle's servant anymore."

"I may be able to help with that. What about the Order?"

McGonagall looked bleak. "There is no more Order of the Phoenix. It was built on a lie and the only thing that held it together was Dumbledore and Fawkes. Nobody trusts anybody else, Severus has been completely frozen out, and we have no leader."

"Why can you not lead it?"

"Because I am Dumbledore's protégé. I am even less trusted than Severus to those who are not attached to the school. Most members of the Order were only there because of Albus, the hero who defeated the last Dark Lord. They don't want to be associated with Dumbledore, the Evil Lord of Light."

Harry couldn't help it. He started laughing at the new title for Dumbledore. Seeing Minerva's glare, he stopped. "I'm sorry, but do you know just how damn silly that sounds? What an oxymoron. Tom Riddle would be cracking up if he heard it. Probably break Dumbledore out of Azkaban just to try to recruit him!"

Minerva smiled faintly at the ridiculousness of that, then put a serious look on. "Nevertheless, it has affected us greatly. Enrollment is down for new students, and many post-O.W.L. students are opting for home or independent study. 80 of the new students are muggleborn, those who know nothing about our world. Most of the rest are poverty cases who cannot afford private study. That is why I called you."

"Originally I planned to ask you to not return to Hogwarts due to the disruption to learning that you would bring with your new status." Harry nodded. "Due however to the enrollment figures, I need you to return. Your presence can bring credibility back to the school. Credibility which is sorely needed. If we cannot do something with this generation of students, there will be no more Hogwarts because we will lose this war. It could mean the end of Wizarding Britain."

"I will have to think about that. Should I return, there would have to be some changes made that will make many people uncomfortable. I had planned on independent study myself, it was suggested that I hire tutors, however we may be able to work something out. I do know that I need this school and the students in order to create the alliances that could break the power of Voldemort. I will get back to you in a few days, after I have spoken with some advisors."

"I suppose that is the best I can expect."

"Changing the subject, have you heard from the Weasleys?"

"No, I haven't. I have tried to contact them several times without success. I have not received Ronald's reply owl on his N.E.W.T. level classes, nor Miss Weasley's confirmation. Arthur has been on a leave of absence since the trial and I cannot even get a reply owl back from the twins when I attempt to order merchandise."

Harry gawked. "You, ordering Weasley Wizarding Wheezes?" The very thought was, for some reason, disturbing.

"I needed a laugh. That and the fact that I was trying to contact them to inquire about the family. I even attempted to owl Charlie. The letter was returned undeliverable."

"Something is wrong with this situation. Let me speak with some folk and get back to you."

"Harry, I am sorry for dumping all of this on you. You are 16 years old, you shouldn't have to be taking on this kind of responsibility. You should be having fun with your friends, chasing girls, not having to hold 2 seats in the Wizengamot and helping me bring the school back to life."

"Minerva, don't apologise. A wise man once said that with great power comes great responsibility. Now I didn't ask for either the power or responsibility, but since it was given to me, I have to either use it properly or abdicate. And I cannot do that. Tom Riddle has great power, he has not used it responsibly from the start. Albus Dumbledore had great power, but he allowed it to corrupt him, thinking that he was a law unto himself. I need good, steady people around me to help insure that I never become that way."

"Well, Harry, it has been wonderful dumping all of this in your lap,

however I have to prepare for a meeting with the school governors. They are demanding a few answers and I want to see if I can string enough nonsensical phrases together so that I appear to know what I am doing."

"What time is the meeting?"

"In 3 hours, why?"

"I'll be back in 2. I would like to go over some things with you then. But first I would like a second opinion of my idea."

"Anything I can help with, what is it?"

"Actually, it was not you that I needed the opinion from." Seeing her puzzled look, Harry reached up on a shelf and picked up the Sorting Hat.

"Lord Potter-Black? I like it, shows class. I told you then that you would go far in Slytherin."

"Yes, but that's what I wanted to talk with you about. I would have hit the same wall that many others are hitting in Slytherin. Nobody trusts them."

"I have warned the school time and again that they needed to unite. Why do you think that they would now? I have been doing this for over 1000 years and they still are at each others throats. How do you think that you can make the change?"

"Because even after you warn them, you continue to sort them. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result."

"You understand, I had to work within the perimeters I was given. If you can get the governors to change the perimeters, I will be allowed

to go along."

"That is the answer I was looking for. Will you speak at the meeting with me?"

"If you so desire"

"Thank you. By the way, why didn't you let my mother know about her real family? I'm sure that you saw that she wasn't a muggleborn."

The Hat sighed. "I did. But at that point, she had been raised by the Evans' her entire life. It was the only way of life she knew. Harry, you have to remember, at that age, she WAS Lily Evans. She also made me promise that if I ever sorted any of her children that I would keep the secret unless she had informed them first. That is why I sorted her into Gryffindor instead of Ravenclaw. She had an uncommon amount of courage to face 7 years here as a muggleborn. At any time, she could have taken the easy route and declared her heritage, but she didn't. She was also very Slytherin in that she faced Dumbledore every day and never let on that she despised him for what he had done to her and her sister. She also knew that if she let slip her heritage, she would never see her sister again. Petunia was not suited to be raised as a squib, no matter how much she would have been loved. Squibs are treated no better in this world than you were treated at Petunia's. You and Lily were the only 2 that I have seen in all of my days who would have done well in any house that I sorted you into. I sorted the two of you into Gryffindor not only because of your courage, but also because of the power structure at the time would help you excel.

"Thank you, old friend. I will see you shortly."

With that, Harry took off the hat, and after bidding McGonagall adieu, grabbed a pinch of floo powder and went back to the Manor.

Conference Room, Hogwarts

"It's insane, I tell you! The parents will never agree, and the school will be shut down from lack of enrollment!"

"Horace, listen to yourself. The school is on the verge of shutting down anyway for that same reason. Most of the newcomers have no idea what to expect anyway. I believe that Lord Potter-Black's idea has merit. We have been at each other's throats for far too long."

"You would think that since you are a damned mudblood with no sense of tradition!"

"It's better than being an inbred pureblood bigot!"

Harry sighed. Somehow he knew that it would degrade to this level. The meeting had started out well, with all of the governors congratulating him on his recent seating at the Wizengamot. When he had introduced his idea, there had been a complete meltdown of the board members. They were evenly divided, the only bright spot being that it was not Light wizard against Dark, and not pureblood against all others. Rather it was traditionalists against progressives. The present idiocy had been going on for over an hour. He decided that he would give them 5 more minutes, then change the paradigm.

He summoned a house elf and sent it to McGonagall's office to bring the Sorting Hat in. He then pointed his wand at his throat and whispered "Sonus!" Harry gave them another minute and spoke loudly. "ENOUGH!"

The arguing stopped immediately as they looked at him in shock. Quickly casting the countercharm, he fixed each and every one of them with a look that broached no disagreement. "The only thing that you listened to was the basic premise before you began shouting at each other. Its time that you listened to the rest of the story, so to speak. I have good reasons for this radical change, and there is a way to implement it without too much disruption. I'll start with the first.

This school is fractured almost beyond repair. If you do not do something quickly, it will be too late. Too late for the school, too late for our world. If we do not begin to stand against our enemies, we might as well surrender and hand our freedom over to Voldemort." There were gasps that he used the dreaded name, but not as bad as he thought.

"The Gryffindors are considered brave to a fault. The cowardly Peter Pettigrew betrayed my parents and lay the blame on Sirius Black. Does that mean that the Hat made a mistake? Hufflepuff is considered a bunch of duffers, not useful for very much, yet Madam Bones was a Hufflepuff. Would any of you consider her a duffer? Cedric Diggory was chosen by the Goblet of Fire to be the champion of Hogwarts. Brave, intelligent and cunning. Did the Hat make a mistake there? Ravenclaw is considered so intelligent that they should all be professors... even the first years. My mother, who was considered the smartest witch of her generation, and Hermione Granger, who IS the smartest witch in this one, were sorted into a different house. Luna Lovegood, who believes everything her dad prints in the Quibbler to be hard fact, is a Ravenclaw. Did the Hat make a mistake?"

"Then there is Slytherin. They are distrusted by everyone. When I first heard about the Houses, I was told that there had never been a wizard gone bad who did not come from Slytherin. That is why I fought the Hat so hard when it wanted to sort me into that House." There were gasps around the table. No one other than the Hat and McGonagall knew that. "That's right, Slytherin. How far do you think that I would have gotten with the Slytherin label on me? After all, Tom Riddle, aka Lord Voldemort was a Slytherin. And the premise of wizards gone bad only coming from Slytherin, that is patently ridiculous. Voldemort has only roughly 25 of his forces and supporters from that House. The rest are scattered between the other 3 houses. Phineas Nigellus Black was a Slytherin, he was also one of the most honorable and competent Headmasters that this school has ever had. He was also one of the few Slytherins to ever

hold that post. He could have become Minister of Magic, something that I know he wanted, had he not have been viewed through the prism of anti Slytherin prejudice."

At that, the Board members looked at the portrait of Black. The portrait nodded in agreement and addressed the governors. "He's right, you know. The Hat sees our thirst to succeed and our ambition and sorts us accordingly. The others see us in that house and automatically distrust us. When my Heir Sirius was accused of high crimes and thrown in prison, no one looked at the fact that he was a Gryffindor. When the real traitor was revealed, his house was not mentioned either. Even now I hear people say that I must have done something wrong and evil while I was Headmaster, just because I am a Slytherin. Were it not that so many purebloods, the backbone of power in the government, are sorted into Slytherin, or at least have a lot of family in that House, we would not get anywhere at all. Even then we are looked at with suspicion. I did want to be Minister of Magic, and I believe that I would have been a good one. Instead I became the best Headmaster that I could."

Harry jumped in. "When Dumbledore's trial was held, the Chief Warlock Pro Tem was Mr. Zabini, a Slytherin. There was no objection because they knew he was fair. But he started out in the Wizengamot under a cloud of suspicion. He had to serve almost 10 years before anyone on the Light side trusted him. He told me last week that he has heard comments that he must have been incorrectly sorted." The Slytherin governors could be seen to nod in agreement, even those who had been so against the plan from the beginning.

"Well then Lord Potter-Black, how would this be implemented?" This was from Horace Albers, the man who had thrown up so much opposition just a few moments ago. "What would be the purpose of the Sorting Hat then?"

"The first thing would be to abolish the 4 houses. They may have served their purpose at one time, but they are no longer useful.

Instead, for disciplinary purposes, points, etc, you would have dorms 1 through 4. Instead of having a whole bunch of people who are put together simply because of one personality trait, you would have a even blend of personality traits scattered throughout each dorm. This would prevent the stereotyping of a certain student simply because they are in a particular dorm. This would be the Sorting Hat's job, to put together a balanced group." Instead of a house cup, there would be a dorm cup. The Quiddich cup would be awarded without being tied to the dorm cup."

"That is another thing, Quiddich. The cup has been associated with houses for so long that it has become another point of contention. Rather than have the teams tied to a particular house or dorm, you could have four team, the Lions, Ravens, Serpents and Badgers. Anyone from any dorm could try out for any team. Retire the old cup and create a new one. Tradition is wonderful, but there comes a time when holding on to tradition simply for its own sake becomes counterproductive."

Reginald Billbus, a Hufflepuff graduate asked, "What does the Sorting Hat think of this idea? I did notice that you had it brought in."

The Hat spoke up. "I have been trying to bring about school unity for hundreds of years. All of the students take the same classes, if the differences were so great, they should have had different curricula for different Houses in order to bring out the best in them, playing only to their strengths. I wholeheartedly support Lord Potter-Black's plan. In fact, I support it so much that should you fail to at least give it a try, I will refuse to sort this term."

Shock filled the room. Even Harry had not realized the depth of the Hat's disagreement with it's original purpose. The governors were the most shocked of all. "What do you mean, refuse to sort?" asked Horace.

"Just what I said. I am the only one here who can. It took the

combined power of the four founders to create me. Does anyone here think that they or anyone else can replace me and end up with the same results? I have 1000 years of experience at what I do, and ever since the time that the houses became more than just friendly rivals, it has been a wreck waiting to happen. I can do the job that Lord Potter-Black asks, but I will not do the job I have been doing! It is time to build new traditions at Hogwarts!"

At that, opposition crumbled. There might have still been opposition to the boy Lord's idea, but the Hat ended up having the last word. With some misgivings, they voted the plan in and asked Harry to assist in implementing it. The meeting broke up and Harry, McGonagall, and the Hat went up to her office to have a long talk.

"Harry", McGonagall said, " You blindsided me in there. I had no idea that you were going to put forth something that radical. I don't like being blindsided, in fact, I am not a fan of surprises at all. Why did you not inform me of your plan?"

"Because I know you, Minerva. I know that you don't like surprises, and I know that you are, for the most part, a traditionalist. And besides, the look on your face was priceless."

"Such cheek. Well then, Lord Potter-Black, I require you to come up with something that I can send to the parents to explain what is about to happen. I am hoping that the older students will come back, but they will all need to be resorted. Do that and I will award 50 points to whatever dorm the Hat sorts you into, fail and I will deduct 50 points and you can explain to your dormmates the reason. I need it done by Monday. I will also need a press release to the same effect. In fact, I would like you to explain your plan for the school to the press. I will be there to support you, but just like the meeting we left, it will be your show."

Harry gulped. He had just stuck his foot in it again.

A/N: I would like to remind everyone of a few things. Harry is not some kind of superwizard, he has no massive magic that he will be using. He is an accidental hero, pretty fast about thinking on his feet, but tends to do things on the spur of the moment without fully considering the ramifications. He is, after all, just 16, even if he has had to grow up quicker than most of his peers.

Also realize that the goblins have been instrumental in many of the things that have happened to Harry in his rise to power. He trusts them a little too much. He is using Goblin advisors because of this. The Goblins may just have their own agenda. Do you really think that they had no knowledge of Harry's heritage prior to the day of their 'revelation'? I mean, keeping track of everyone magical is a responsibility of theirs. That's why certain vaults had not been disposed of when everyone thought the owner dead without heirs. There is also the House of Dumbledore to think of. Is there REALLY no Heir? No one to hold his seat? No one who thinks that Dumblders was unfairly treated?

Think on it.

Hamilton Wrye

Chapter 6

New Enemies

The Hog's Head, Hogsmead

There was not many people in the Hog's Head on this night. This was alright with Aberforth Dumbledore. He was grieving and really did not want to be disturbed by such things as making money. Of course, if things kept going the way they were, he wouldn't have to worry about that anyway.

In the last few weeks, he has lost everything. He had lost his brother, the family fortune and properties, his side income from his brother, and his reason for staying in Hogsmead. The only reason that he had opened this dump was because Albus had asked him to. He needed a place where dodgy characters would not be afraid to go and drink, thereby loosening their lips and allowing Albus, through Aberforth to pick up gossip about the darker dealings in the wizarding world. It was all to keep the school safe and pass on information to the Order of the Phoenix.

All of this was ruined by that little bastard Harry Potter. The Order was gone, his brother sent to Azkaban on trumped up charges, and all of the family's fortune gone. Aberforth had no idea how he was going to be able to continue supporting his granddaughter and her children. He could leave nothing to them, no legacy, since his money had been in Albus' vault for safekeeping. Albus had taken care of the kids after his son's death. All Aberforth could claim is the hereditary seat in the Wizengamot. And right now he could not even do that since the signet ring denoting the Head of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Dumbledore was at this time resting in Potter's vault at Gringotts. The hell of it was that the brat didn't even realize it. And to think that Albus had done so much for that kid, rescuing him and keeping him safe for all of these years, taking care of his finances so that he wouldn't be swindled. And how does he repay

him? By sticking a knife in his back.

A light came into the pub as the door opened and a figure in a hooded cloak entered. Aberforth gave a disinterested glance and went back to wiping the same dirty glass with the same dirty rag.

"Buy a girl a drink, handsome?" Aberforth knew that voice, one of the few who could make him smile.

"Violet!" He came around the bar and hugged his granddaughter. "What brings you here today? Not that I'm complaining you know."

"I came to see you and see how you are doing. I know that this whole thing has been hard on you. I also wanted to know if there was anything that could be done to keep us in our home."

Aberforth froze. "What do you mean?"

"It seems that Uncle Albus owned the house. I just got a notice from Gringotts to vacate the house by September 1st. It seems the new owner," She said this with not just a little bitterness, "Wants to either dispose of the property or convert it to his own use."

"Damn him!" Aberforth was seething. "That house was purchased with my money, Albus was only holding the deed for me. When will that little bastard quit persecuting our family?"

"Grandpa, he might not even know. I doubt if he has looked at his holdings from Uncle Albus, he probably decided to let the goblins handle all of the details."

"Don't defend him! Don't you realize that he is the cause of our troubles? Pretending to be a Light wizard, he is as Dark as they come. I wouldn't doubt that he knows exactly what is going on and is just trying to stick the knife in deeper."

"Why don't you let me find out? I will owl him and explain the situation, then if he is as cruel as you believe and turns us down, I can take it to the Daily Prophet. They have had it out for him for years."

Aberforth looked at his granddaughter with new respect. "Not a bad idea. Use his own reputation against him. You know that he has the House signet ring?"

"Why! He can't use it, the seat is hereditary."

"Albus put it into the vault for safekeeping. Really, who would question the identity of Albus Dumbledore?"

"I'll ask him about that also. We'll see what this 'Lord Potter-Black' is really made of."

With that, she gave her Grandfather a kiss and left.

Black Manor, Kent

Harry was just coming in the door as the grey owl swept down and landed on the railing in front of him. He had been in the garden watching Vernon and Dursley, his house-muggles pulling weeds and de-gnoming the garden. Or rather attempting to de-gnome the garden. It seemed that with their reduced size, the gnomes were not very impressed with the two. The gnomes were not used to people the size of four year old children grabbing them and attempting to throw them over the fence. It made for a very entertaining scene watching the gnomes fighting back. All of this happened with Blinky, the manor's head elf screaming at the pair of Dursleys. Blinky was there since Harry had given Kreacher head duties at 12 Grimmauld Place and overall elf-hiring duties. He did not want Kreacher hanging around the manor since there would be other-than-pureblood wizards and witches visiting and staying at the manor. Harry and Kreacher were both satisfied with the arrangement and the elf had made hiring decisions accordingly.

Harry took the letter from the owl, dug in his pocket for an owl treat, and gave it to the owl. The bird did not fly off, so Harry figured that he was waiting for a response. "Come along, I will need to read this inside." Harry held out his arm and the owl hopped on.

When he got to the study, he put the owl on Hedwig's perch (she was out on an errand), and opened the letter.

Dear Lord Potter-Black;

My name is Violet Dumbledore. I am the granddaughter of Aberforth Dumbledore and the great niece of Albus Dumbledore. I am writing to you today in desperation. My grandfather purchased the house where my children and I live, but gave the deed to my Uncle Albus for safekeeping. He also had Uncle Albus manage our income from his vault. With the sentencing of my uncle, the deed and all of our money went into your vault, as well as the family signet ring. We are destitute and have received notice from Gringotts to vacate our home by September 1st.

Can you please find it in your heart to allow us to continue living in our home? I am not asking for money, I will find a way to survive somehow, but I pray that you will show mercy and not let what was once a great family perish. I am also asking for the return of the signet ring to my grandfather, the rightful head of our House. You cannot claim his seat, and while you have the ring, neither can he. He cannot name an Heir unless he has it, and he is not much younger than Uncle Albus.

Sincerely,

Violet Dumbledore

Harry was stunned. He had no idea that Dumbledore had heirs who would suffer through his action. He had heard that Albus had a

brother, but had never paid much attention to the whole thing. He had not even seen what Dumbledore's restitution had put in his vaults, he had just told the goblin advisor to handle it. He quickly penned a response and gave it to the owl to deliver. Going to the fireplace, he took a pinch of floo powder, tossed it in the fire and, stepping in, said "Gringotts", and disappeared.

Entering Flickaxe's office, Harry tossed the letter from Violet Dumbledore down on the desk. "What is the meaning of this?"

Picking up the letter, Flickaxe scanned it, then smiled. "Oh, that. We will have the property ready for your use by the first of October. We just had to give the tenants notice."

"But it wasn't even Albus Dumbledore's property! It should have never been in the transaction."

"Lord Black, possession is nine points of the law, even in the wizarding world. Do you realize that gaining the Dumbledore vault has made you the richest wizard in the world? Before you were only the second wealthiest."

"The vault is still intact then?"

"Absolutely. There was not enough room in your vaults for the contents, and it is an old family vault, very prestigious you know."

"In that case, I need an inventory list. Then I need to go to the vault."

Twenty minutes later, Harry was careening down the rail track in the cart going to the Dumbledore vault. He had played his cards close to the vest, telling Flickaxe to rescind the eviction order and schedule a meeting with Aberforth Dumbledore and his granddaughter Violet for the next day. Having looked over the inventory list, he saw that the vault did not have nearly as much money as the joint Potter-Black vaults, but they would still support a family for several generations.

Harry supposed that some of the Dumbledore family had decided to live off the vault rather than adding to the fortune. No matter, that was their decision. There were a few items in the vault he was interested in however.

Arriving at the vault, Griphook took the key and opened the door. It did not take long to find what he was looking for, the goblins having inventoried and cataloged the location of everything inside. Harry took a bottomless transport bag and loaded it up with the items that he needed. He was sure that the Dumbledore clan was not very happy with him right now, and was hoping to, if not gain them as allies, at least keep them from becoming declared enemies. Allies or enemies, they could hold a lot of sway. Harry took one more look around and left.

Later that night, Harry was going through Albus Dumbledore's journals, those being the main thing that he had required from the vault. He was marking passages and putting indexing tabs on the appropriate pages. It took him several hours, but by 9 pm, he was done. He then called Blinky.

"Yes, Lord Black? How can Blinky serve you?"

"Bring me the two muggles and the clothes in which they arrived."

Blinky looked horrified. "Lord Black is going to free the muggles?"

"Well, they are really not very useful, are they?"

"Blinky has tried to make them better workers, but they are useless. Lord Black should have gotten elves instead. Blinky is very sorry that he could not train them better." Harry saw that Blinky was about to punish himself and stopped him.

"Blinky, before you can train someone properly, you have to have something to work with. You have actually done wonders with them.

They are at least respectful now and know their place... below house elves."

"There is that.. Stupid muggles deserve to lose the honor of working for Lord Black. Giving them clothes will properly shame them"

"That's the spirit! Go fetch them and their clothes. But make sure they bathe first. Working out in that garden has probably made them stink."

"Oh yes, Blinky had them fertilizing the roses. That dragon dung is not pleasant." With that, the elf disappeared.

Less than 20 minutes later, Blinky appeared with Dudley and Vernon. He gave them each a kick in the rump and screamed at them. "Show proper respect for the great Lord Black!" The two mini-muggles got down on their knees and bowed until their foreheads touched the ground.

"Rise." When the Dursleys stood, Harry fixed them with a icy glare. They trembled. "I am dismissing you from my service. I hope that you have learned something from this experience." They nodded quickly, afraid to speak. I have called in an Obliviator to erase all of your memories of me and of the magical world. When you awaken, you will be in your new home in London. I can't take a chance on sending you back to Little Whinging, you might somehow recover memories when you are confronted with the horrors that happened there. You will be able to return to your job, as far as the company knows, you have been on compassionate leave due to your wife dying in a tragic auto accident." Harry thought that was especially appropriate since Petunia and Vernon had told him that his parents had died the same way. "Terrible thing, driving drunk. She should have been more careful. I have put £50,000 in your bank account, the money being an insurance policy on Petunia's life. I have kept the house in Little Whinging, since you stole £3000 per month for 15 years, I figure that I own it. Blinky, bring them back to normal."

Blinky pointed his finger at the two, and they grew back to their normal size. Unfortunately, their elf uniforms stayed their proper size, ripping until they were nothing but rags. He then handed them their clothes. "Filthy muggles, you are disgraced and dismissed from the service of the benevolent Lord Black. Your shame shall follow you forever!"

The Dursleys quickly dressed, then turned to face Harry. "Just so you know, I am having the Obliviator leave one memory. Your company's major stockholder is none other than Lord Potter-Black. Should I ever find out that you are bullying or mistreating anyone ever again, I will make it my personal mission to destroy you. That goes double for you Dudley."

There was a knock on the door and the Obliviator from the Ministry came in. Harry gave her the perimeters and she performed the spell. She then led the dazed Dursleys out the door into their new lives. Blinky looked at Harry in awe.

"Lord Black is a great and terrible wizard! Your wrath knows no bounds. Not only have you shamed them with clothes, you disgraced them by making them take money from you! You did not even leave them with the happy memories of working for you. Please Master, if Blinky ever displeases you, just kill me, I could not stand the shame."

"Blinky, I seriously doubt that you could ever disappoint me like they did, but if you do, I will go ahead and do as you ask." With that, the happy elf went off to supervise his staff.

A/N: I know this one is a bit short, but the it would have been too long had I continued to the logical end. The next one will have somewhat of a showdown between the Dumbledores and Harry.

Chapter 7

Let the Games Begin!

Gringotts Bank

The Next Day

Harry and Flickaxe were having tea and scones the next morning while waiting for Aberforth and Violet Dumbledore. At least Harry was having tea and scones, Flickaxe was having some unidentifiable pieces of dried meat and washing them down with a smoking brew. Harry had no interest in what the goblin could possibly be consuming, something told him that he didn't really want to know. He figured that if he ever had a goblin as a guest, the house elves would be familiar with goblin cuisine.

Harry had asked Flickaxe about the fact that Violet Dumbledore carried her maiden name rather than her late husband's. It turned out that her husband had been a secret Death Eater during Voldemort's first reign of terror, and when Harry had destroyed Voldemort's body, Violet's husband had gone into hiding, never to be seen again. As the Head of the family, Albus Dumbledore had annulled their marriage and restored the Dumbledore name to Violet and her children. The two children were Jonathon, now aged 18, and Jessica, who was born just 6 months after Voldemort's disappearance. To protect the children from any attacks by Riddle's followers, he had sent the children to Canada for their schooling.

There was a knock on the door and Griphook stuck his head in. "Mr. and Miss Dumbledore are here for their appointment."

"Send them in."

The Dumbledores had not been informed of the purpose of the meeting, but then again, neither had Flickaxe. He only knew that the

wealthiest customer they had wanted to speak with a couple of people in perfect privacy, and that it had something to do with the bank. This was enough to insure that his wishes would be carried out. With that kind of money, had Harry wanted to kill the Dumbledores, the goblins would have cleaned up the mess with no one the wiser. Aberforth stiffened when he saw Harry.

"What the hell is he doing here?"

"Lord Potter-Black is the one who asked for this meeting."

Harry stood. "I have some items to return to you." He walked over to Violet and handed her the deed for her house, then reached in his pocket and handed Aberforth the family signet ring. He then turned to Flickaxe and, fishing the key to the Dumbledore vault out of another pocket, handed him the key. "I want the vault and all of it's contents returned to the Dumbledore family control."

To say that Aberforth and Violet were shocked would have been an understatement. However the surprise they felt was nothing compared to the shock that went through Flickaxe. "Lord Potter-Black! Have you considered the ramifications of this action? You will no longer be the wealthiest wizard, only the second wealthiest. You are also handing back power to possible enemies and the wealth to carry out revenge."

Harry fixed him with a glare. "Flickaxe, it was mine to dispose of as I see fit. This is the way that I see fit." Turning to Aberforth, Harry softened. "I never meant for Albus to go to prison, but I had to stop him from interfering in my life and finances anymore. He caused great harm to my family and myself. He stole my mother's and my heritage and forced us to grow up in muggle households. He stole money and family heirlooms from me and subjected me to fourteen years of abuse and neglect."

"He tried to keep you safe and help you!"

"No, he tried to manipulate me and make me into a weapon for his own purposes. Do you realize that my childhood was not much different from Voldemort's? I could have turned out exactly like Voldemort?"

"I don't see a whole hell of a lot of difference. You-know-who hated my brother, and all Albus ever tried to do with him was guide him."

Harry reached in the bottomless tote bag and pulled out a series of journals. "I didn't think that you would take me at my word, so here is Albus' own words. I have marked the appropriate pages and passages for you to see for yourself. I got these out of the vault yesterday, they had been removed from his office after the trial. Read for yourself his actions and motivations. The only other thing that I have removed from the vault are photos of my family and Sirius. Those are valuable to me, and you have no use for them. Flickaxe, please take the Dumbledores someplace where they can read Albus' journals in privacy. I need to go to my vault and collect some items to take home."

"The Dumbledores can use my office for the next two hours if they like. I have a board meeting that requires my presence. Mr. Dumbledore, when you and Miss Dumbledore are ready to leave, just summon Griphook and he will escort you either to your vault or to the foyer." With that, Harry and Flickaxe left the office.

Two Hours Later

"Do you believe this flobberworm crap?" Aberforth asked Violet as they closed the last of the journals.

"Of course not. He must have tampered with them somehow. Uncle Albus could have never done the things that are in these books. I would bet that the goblins somehow have a hand in this. I knew there was a reason that Albus never trusted those sharp toothed

creatures."

"So what do we do about it?"

"Simple. Pretend that we do believe it, then work our way in close to Potter. Become his best friends, show proper shame that Albus would betray us so." Seeing her grandfather's face reddening, she quickly went on. "Look, as much as we hate the idea, we need to realize that there is no way that we are going to get Uncle Albus out of prison in the amount of time that he has to live. The best that we can hope for is to rehabilitate his reputation and get the other 16 life sentences and the other parts of the sentence lifted. We need to have a presence in the Wizengamot to remind this country what they owe Albus Dumbledore for the defeat of the Dark Lord Grindlewald in the last war. We need to remind all of the Light families that Harry Potter-Black is not really one of us. But we do it from a position of an ally, not an enemy. If we do that, we will be more believable. There is always the possibility that Potter will die when he meets You-Know-Who. And if he does, we just blame it all on the dead guy. All while shedding the appropriate amount of tears, of course."

Aberforth looked at his granddaughter with new respect. "Damn. It is fortunate that you went to school in Switzerland. The Hat would have sorted you into Slytherin for sure."

"Grandpa, that is exactly why I went to Switzerland. Uncle Albus had me try on the hat about six months prior to when I would have started Hogwarts. When the Hat said that I would have been in Slytherin, he bundled me up and shipped me off to the Alps."

With that, they summoned Griphook and left.

Looking through an invisible window into his office, Flickaxe checked over the transcript of the conversation between the Dumbledores that his auto-quill had made. With goblin patience, he had watched and listened the entire time that the pair had been in the office.

Casting a spell on his own head, he held up a vial and allowed the memory of the conversation to fill it. He capped the vial, put it with the transcript and pondered what he should do with it. He decided to put it in the bank's memory vault. Who knew when it could come in handy.

12 Grimmauld Place

"My Lord, I am so happy to see you! It seems like forever since you left to go to the Manor House. Have the elves finished cleaning the place up? And how are your house-muggles coming along?" Mrs. Black's portrait was actually bubbling with excitement.

"Lady Black," Harry greeted the portrait with a slight bow, upon which she actually blushed. "The elves have done a wonderful job, Kreacher is to be commended for his choices in hiring. The house-muggles on the other hand have been a real disappointment. Blinky was able to teach them some manners, but they were too high maintenance, so I had to give them clothes. I did have their memories erased however and gave them a death vow should they ever cross me again."

"Kreacher said that you had made them gardeners, you should have made them butlers or something."

"And deny a perfectly good house elf of an honorable position? Besides, these two were too crude to have that good of a position."

"There is that... well, win some, lose some. At least you did not have a lot of money invested in them."

"Lady Black, I noticed another portrait of you standing with your husband in the manor house."

"Oh, my! I had forgotten that I was there. How am I? And how is Orion?"

"You don't know? I thought that you could travel between your portraits."

"Only if they were painted at the same time as part of a set. You have noticed that when Phineas is in Hogwarts that his canvas is blank here?" Harry nodded. "The painting at the manor house was painted the week that we got back from our honeymoon. In fact, it is the only portrait that Orion would ever allow to be painted of himself. He said that he didn't want to be remembered as some old prune." There was a tear leaking from Mrs. Black's portrait. I would love to visit him/me, but I look so, so,... old. He probably would not give me the time of day. We were so carefree back then. Orion and myself became, oh, I guess you would say, harder. As much as I loved growing older with him, I must say that I miss those days. Did you know that Orion was a Quiddich player when he went to Hogwarts? He was the Slytherin seeker."

"He did mention that. He kidded me quite a bit when I told him that I was a seeker for Gryffindor. It seems that the House rivalries were not quite so vicious back then."

"Oh, the rivalries and distrust of each other was there, but somehow the Quiddich players seemed to separate that from their love of the game. They played hard, win or lose, then congratulated the other team. I would love to be able to watch one of his Quiddich games again. Or at least go flying with Orion."

"Hmm. I wonder..." Harry had an idea that would make things much more pleasant around this house, if it would work. He had gotten very attached to the young Mr. and Mrs. Black during his time at the manor. Sure, they had their prejudices, but they were not nearly as virulent as they had been in later life after the rise of Voldemort. The young Mrs. Black had not only been charming, but had also been very easy on the eyes. Some people just did not age well.

"I have something to check into. I bid you good-day, Lady Black." Harry gave another short bow, then went into his study and called Kreacher.

"Yes, My Lord? How can Kreacher serve you?"

"I would like to find out about a gift for your Mistress, Lady Black."

Kreacher was surprised. He was totally dedicated to his mistress, she was his first owner and would always be first in his heart. He wiggled with excitement. "How can Lord Black give Mistress' portrait a gift?"

"You know how much she loved Orion and how much she misses him?"

Kreacher's face fell. "Kreacher knows that Mistress pines for Master Black."

"Well, I want to try something....."

Diagon Alley

Harry had inquired at Gringotts as to the finest portrait painter in the magical world. The goblins, assuming he wanted his own portrait painted, recommended Andrew Baucus, painter extraordinaire. Now Harry was sitting in his studio. He detailed what he wanted and the painter said he thought he could do the job. He had never done anything quite like this, but there was precedent. Baucus gathered some paints and equipment, a reference book, and an easel, then appeared with Harry to the Manor.

Harry explained to the portraits of the young Mr. and Mrs. Black what he wanted to do, and they agreed. In fact, Orion was really enthused about the experiment, he missed Grimmauld Place. Baucus set up his easel and began to work. Two hours later, there was a canvas on

the easel which depicted the Quiddich pitch at Hogwarts. The stands were filled with people from all houses, but they had no real personality other than the fact that they were rooting for the teams. The two teams were the surprise though. Each was complete with chasers and beaters, but both seeker positions were empty. Both teams were Slytherin, with one team wearing green robes trimmed in silver and the other wearing silver robes with green trim. Lying on the ground in the middle of the pitch were two empty robes and two broomsticks. Baucus had painted all of the player's brooms to be state of the art Firebolts (he used Harry's as a model) and programmed the players to play different historical games between professional teams. He programmed over 100 various games into the teams, then told Harry how to program later games. Baucus then painted every single room into a different picture as a floor plan, then went outside to paint the exterior of the manor around the rooms, enclosing them.

The next part was the trickiest. Baucus took his wand, and holding it against the Black's portrait, made a magical copy of the picture, duplicating the magical signatures. This copied the personalities of the portraits onto a gossamer magical web. He picked up the painting of the Manor and his blank canvas, then Harry and Baucus appeared to Grimmauld Place. Appearing in the Foyer, Harry greeted Mrs. Black and introduced the painter.

"Lady Black, I would like to, with your permission, grant you a gift." Seeing her interest perk, Harry went on. "I would like to reunite you, in your younger body, with Orion."

She gasped. "But My Lord, how is that possible?" Harry explained the procedure. "Andrew here has copied the magical signature and essence of yours and Orion's portrait. He can place it in your portrait here, Orion would be copied here and you would once again become youthful."

"Would I forget everything?"

"No, but the painful things would fade and you would become that carefree girl again. You would retain your memories of getting older, but they would fade and become as a background thought unless you decided that you wanted to access them. As an added bonus, when he finishes, your other selves will be able to visit each other. There will be a painting of the manor that you can access here, and they will have one of this house."

"Are you sure that it will work?"

Andrew spoke up. I am reasonably certain, the spells usually work the other way, with wizards updating their previous portraits, but so far the paints have gone on easily and the magic is flowing well."

With an excited giggle, (she already seemed to drop a few years of hard living) Mrs. Black gave her acquiescence. Baucus got to work. He transferred the gossamer web onto the portrait, then spelled it to overlay the existing image and integrate itself. The face and body of Mrs. Black grew increasingly younger, then stopped at the age of the Manor house's portrait. Orion Black woke up, stretched, then looked at his companion.

"Darling! Is it really you?" Mrs. Black giggled.

"As much me as a portrait can get." Orion said. They turned to Harry. "My Lord, how can we thank you?"

"Enjoy yourselves. You have a lot of catching up to do. Andrew is going to spell the manor painting to allow you in, then he is going to paint this house and take it back to the Manor. When you wish to visit your other selves, just walk through the door in back of you and you will appear in the manor portrait. Your counterparts can do the same thing there to arrive here. There is also another picture that you will enjoy. After he finishes with the house painting, he will be painting two portraits of me, one for each house. That way when I pass on, it

will be part of the same series of paintings and I will be able to join you."

"Why would you want to be painted now?" asked Orion.

"Because there is a very good chance that I will not be alive at an old age. If I am, then there will be portraits of both ages, but they will be confined to one place since they will not be in the same series. I have to face the False Lord and only one of us can survive, possibly neither. I have accepted this, but if I can take him out, even if I die in the process, I will still have won. I will need to escort Andrew around the house so that he can paint every room, so I will be gone quite a while. I will meet you at the Manor."

A few hours later, the weary Andrew and Harry appeared to the Manor with the painting of Grimmauld Place held between them. They came in the middle of a rough and tumble Quiddich match being played out to an enthusiastic audience of elves. The two Orions were each in a Slytherin uniform playing seeker against each other in the Pitch painting. Their wives were in the stands rooting for them. Harry couldn't tell them apart, and wondered if their husbands could. This brought up some very disturbing thoughts, but Harry decided to ponder that philosophical question later. The house elves were shouting, throwing popcorn at the portrait and laying bets on which team would win the game. Most of them were also very drunk on butterbeer. It made for quite a rowdy crowd.

When the green robed Orion caught the snitch while flying inverted, there were cheers, groans, and money began changing hands between the elves. The teams landed, shook hands all around, then flew off, leaving the two Black pairs in the painting. They came up to the forefront and waved to Harry.

"This is bloody brilliant!" one of the Orions gushed. Harry could not tell which. "I can hardly wait until we can get your Gryffindor carcass in here and play you."

"I just hope that it is not too soon," interjected the other. "I mean, you would have to die first, and we can wait until you are an oldster. Time has no meaning for us here."

"It was a great game," said Harry, "But I think that I'm going to have to talk with the elves. I'm glad they had a good time, but I think that it should be restricted to a schedule. Otherwise they would become a bunch of lushes and couch potatoes. Maybe on weekends they could watch the matches. That way they will have some time to sober up. As it is, the whole staff of both houses are going to be feeling the butterbeer hangovers in the morning. Besides, it is a sneaky way to enforce some days off for them, maybe relax them a bit."

"Have Kreacher talk to the staff in the morning, My Lord," said one of the Mrs. Blacks. Harry thought it might be the Grimmauld Place Lady. She did seem just a bit more reserved and mature than the other, although not by much. "He can do it after he wakes up and shakes off his hangover." She giggled. So much for mature. Harry enjoyed having the Blacks this way, carefree and young. That older Mrs. Black was a horrible fate to look forward to. Now she wouldn't have to.

Harry patted himself on the back for a job well done and headed up to bed, wondering if there would be at least one elf sober enough in the morning to fix breakfast.

A/N: I really enjoyed writing this chapter. I have decided who my Light pairing should be, but who should be the Dark witch who will complete the Potter-Black poly-marriage? PM me on this one, I don't want to give the winning witch away. Make it an existing character from canon please. Or at least from an existing Dark family.

Hamilton.

Chapter 8

And How Was YOUR Day?

Downtown London

Harry was having a rough day. It had not started out that way, however it rapidly began to go downhill. He woke up feeling fine, with a feeling of accomplishment. The portraits of the Black's had been overjoyed when he had left them. Harry had looked around at the den, noticing the spilled popcorn and the empty butterbeer bottles and snickered to himself, but dismissed it thinking that the house elves would be properly chagrined and have it cleaned up in no time.

It had not worked out quite that way. The kitchen elf who normally made his breakfast, Tinkle, was hung-over and barely civil. She placed a plate of runny eggs, burnt toast, and sausages that had become charcoal in front of Harry, growled and disappeared. Harry took one taste, then banished the rest to the garbage. Passing by the room containing the Black's portraits, he looked in and saw the same mess. Harry just shook his head. Thinking he could get a decent meal at Grimmauld Place, he quickly floo-ed over to find the house completely empty except for Kreacher, who told him that all of the elves were at the Manor. Having tasted Kreacher's cooking, Harry decided to eat in muggle London.

Harry was less than a block from the restaurant, coming up to a traffic signal when the signet ring on his left hand gave him a shock. He pulled his hand off the wheel and shook it in surprise. A moment later, the ring on his right hand did the same thing. This time, he grabbed the ring with his left hand to pull it off. A jerk from behind his navel told him that he had done the wrong thing.

Having not expected portkeying, Harry landed hard in front of an Auror who was guarding the entrance doors of the Wizengamot. The Auror looked down at him with a touch of disapproval. "Lord

Potter-Black, the normal attire for meetings is formal robes." Seeing that Harry was wearing Dockers, a tee shirt and trainers, it was obvious that Harry was a bit underdressed.

"I didn't realize that there was a meeting called," said Harry.

"You got the summoning signal in your ring, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I had no idea what it was. No one told me the damned thing was booby trapped. How long do I have before it convenes?"

"About 15 minutes, sir. And Lord Potter-Black..."

"Yes?"

"It looks like the booby trap worked. I mean, it did catch the booby." This was said with the slightest smile to take away the sting. Had Harry been one of those other tight-arsed Lords that the Auror normally had to deal with, the words would have never left his lips.

"That should be enough time. KREACHER!" The old house elf popped into view. "Kreacher, I need you to pop over to the house and get my formal grey robes with the dual crest on them and get right back here. And better grab some black dress shoes while you're at it." The elf nodded and popped out, only to reappear in less than a minute with the items requested.

"Anything else, Lord Black?"

"Yes, see if you can find my car and find out what happened to it. I left it in kind of a hurry." Pulling on his robes and shoes, Harry handed back his trainers to Kreacher, dismissed him and went inside to his seat.

"Glad to see you could make it, Lord Potter-Black," said Lord Zabini, as Harry sat down. Harry looked down at the audience floor and saw,

to his surprise, Aberforth Dumbledore, along with a young man of about 18, a young lady around Harry's age, and Violet Dumbledore.

"Oyez, Oye!, This session of the Wizengamot is now called to order! Grand Wizard Pro-tem Zabini presiding. All having business with this Honorable body come forward!"

Aberforth Dumbledore stepped forward and held out his right hand, the Dumbledore signet ring flashing in the torchlight. "I, Aberforth Dumbledore, hereby claim my rights as the Head of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Dumbledore, and proclaim my right to a seat and vote in this august body!"

"Well spoken, Lord Dumbledore." In the background, Harry heard whispering between other members of the Wizengamot. "Wondered when goat-boy was going to make an appearance," and "At least he left his pets at home." Zabini cleared his throat and spoke.

"Please rise. Lord Dumbledore, we accept your petition to join this body and claim your vote. We affirm your inheritance and invite you as a brother to join magic. Please hold up your wand." Aberforth did so. "Do you, Lord Dumbledore, vow to uphold the honor of this august body, protect and defend the wizarding world against all enemies, from within or without?"

"I, Lord Dumbledore, so vow."

Harry, remembering this from his own induction, held out his wand along with the other members. The gold dome made from the lights of the wands covered Dumbledore, then receded.

"Before I take a seat, I have two more petitions for this body." Zabini motioned Aberforth to go ahead. "I, Aberforth Dumbledore hereby name as my heir, magical and otherwise, my great-grandson, Jonathon Dumbledore." This was the most binding form of naming an heir. The only way that it could be rescinded would be if Jonathon

should die before Aberforth.

"Well spoken, Lord Dumbledore. Jonathon Dumbledore, congratulations on your naming," said Zabini. "I believe that you stated that you had one other matter of business?"

"I do. I, Lord Aberforth Dumbledore, hereby abdicate my seat and my position as Head of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Dumbledore in favor of my heir, Jonathon Dumbledore. I also pass my title of Lord Dumbledore over to Jonathon Dumbledore."

Whispering broke out all over the chamber. "What the hell?" "That has to be the shortest tenure since Roderick the Unlucky tripped and broke his neck on the way to his seat." And "Hope the boy doesn't like goats." Zabini was conferring with an old wizard who had some sort of book opened, pointing out passages.

"ORDER!! Lord Dumbledore, although this is highly unusual, there appears to be nothing prohibiting it. The young man has reached his majority and has been named heir. If you will pass the new Lord Dumbledore his signet ring, we will proceed." Aberforth did so and Jonathon placed it on his finger. "Do you, Lord Jonathon Dumbledore, wish at this time to claim your seat in this august body and your vote associated with that seat?"

"I do, High Warlock."

The Wizengamot went through the same ritual that they had just performed with the elder Dumbledore, then Josiah Zabini instructed Jonathon to choose his seat placement. Jonathon took his wand and levitated the seat from the far right of the Light wizard side toward the aisle, sitting it firmly beside Harry's seat, still on the side of light, then strode up the stairway to take his place. There were several shocked whispers, but then the polite applause began, ending only when Dumbledore took his seat.

Harry noticed that the young lady who had been standing in the Dumbledore group had left the floor with the family, headed for the gallery. He turned to Jonathon and whispered, "Your girlfriend?"

"No, she is my sister, Jennifer." Turning to Harry, he held out his hand. "I know that you have a lot of issues with my great-great uncle, but I hope that you can set that aside. We will be sitting pretty close here for a long time."

"I have nothing against you or your family. Can we get together later so that we can become acquainted?" Harry shook the proffered hand.

"Of course. Send an owl when you are ready. You have to go back to school soon, don't you?"

"September 1st. How about the 25th of August?"

"Sounds good to me. Is it alright to bring a guest or two? My great grandfather will not be coming, he is still in a state of denial and blames you for everything, but my mum and sister would like to come, I am sure."

"It's a date. I will see you then. By the way, I don't know if you know, but if that ring shocks your hand, don't grab it unless you are ready to come here."

"Ahh. I wondered how they got everyone together so quickly." With that, the two waited for the Wizengamot to recess, then left.

Headquarters, Metropolitan Police, London

Harry waited in line to speak to the constable in charge of the desk. When he reached the front, the officer gave him a bored look. "How may I help you?"

"My car turned up missing and I need to file a report."

"Name and address?"

"James Black, 35 Wiltshire Place." This was the dummy address that Gringotts had put on his drivers license and passport. It was a dingy 3rd floor walkup with very few amenities. The first time Harry had seen it was today, he needed to see if it actually existed before he attempted to claim his car. He was unsurprised to see a notice on his door to contact the police at his earliest convenience.

The constable was tapping on his computer. "Ah, here it is. Are you claiming that your automobile was stolen?" He was looking at Harry with an unbelieving stare.

"Yes officer, I am."

"Mr. Black, you will need to speak with Sgt. Robinson in the traffic division. He can take your report." The constable handed Harry a visitor's badge and directed him to the proper room. Harry went through the security screening area, then headed to the office of Sgt. Robinson. Entering, he looked around the room until he saw the sergeant's desk, then went over to introduce himself.

"Sgt. Robinson, my name is James Black. I was told that I needed to see you."

The officer waved Harry to a seat. "Mr. Black, I have been waiting for you. What in the hell possessed you to run off after crashing your car this morning?"

"Excuse me? I came in here to report my car missing."

Robinson grinned like the cat who just found out that canary was on the menu for today's lunch. The red light camera operator had looked through the film taken just before the accident and had reported that

the driver of the auto appeared to be the same person that the car was registered to. They had found this out by checking the driver's license photographs of the registered owner. He was planning on springing this on Harry once he had dug himself in deep enough to warrant charges of filing a false police report and leaving the scene of an accident. After all, traffic detectives did not often have malefactors willingly come in to stick their own heads in a noose.

"Really, and when did this theft happen?"

"I'm not sure of the exact time, I had just come home from a friend's house and discovered the car missing an hour ago. I saw a notice on the door to come in here. You say it was in an accident? You obviously have not caught the thief since you asked that ridiculous question."

Robinson was enjoying himself. He had not seen the actual red light photos, but he knew that if Amanda Jenkins said the photos matched, then they matched. "Mr. Black, may I see your driver's license?" Harry handed it over. Harry was under his 30 year old, sandy haired glamour, and this was what the license showed. Robinson typed in the license number and the license info, along with a matching photograph popped up on the computer screen. Robinson turned the monitor toward Harry.

"This is your license information and your photo, correct?"

"Yes"

Robinson picked up his phone and dialed an internal number. "Jenkins, what is the file number on that accident we spoke of earlier? The old Cooper. Right." Robinson was writing down the reference number. "Thank you." He hung up the receiver, then spun the monitor toward himself, opened up an internal file, and without waiting for it to finish loading, turned the monitor back toward Harry.

"Now, Mr. Black, when this photo comes up on the screen, tell me what the person behind the wheel looks like."

"Hmm. Well, Sergeant, he looks to be underage, maybe 16 years old, black hair, slightly built..."

Robinson grabbed the monitor and spun it back. This could not be right. He gaped at the screen. Sure enough, the picture was of a teenager, not the 30 year old man who was sitting in front of him. Harry was starting to enjoy himself. Recovering quickly, Robinson asked, "Do you recognize the person in your car?" He was going to strangle Jenkins, or at least put in a recommendation that she receive a vision screening.

Harry knew what happened. He had not worn his glamour for the run to the restaurant, so his driver's license reflected that fact. The hapless camera operator must have pulled up the computer file while he was at the Wizengamot with no glamour, making the photos the same. Since he was now wearing a glamour, the computer file also reflected the photo on his license, which changed appearances when he did.

"Looks like a real delinquent, Sergeant. Sneaky look, beady eyes. You should probably check the school records at St. Brutus' School for Incurable Boys. If he is not an inmate there, he should be. Now, what is the status of my car?"

"I'm sorry to say that your car has gone its last mile. The accident was rather spectacular. It rammed the car in front of it in the middle of the intersection, then careened off and struck a signal light, causing the pole to break off and land on the roof. The car is now in impound waiting to be claimed, although the impound fee is probably more than the car is worth. You did have insurance on it?"

"Just liability. I could not see insuring a twenty year old car for anything more. Can I just sign the title over for the impound

charges?"

"You can do that for the disposal, but the towing and impound will also need to be paid since the auto is not worth enough to cover that." Robinson wrote an address on a notepad. "Here is the location of the car, I suggest that you go there before the storage fees become unreasonable. I'm sorry about your car, but we will endeavor to catch the thief as soon as possible."

Harry stood up. "Thank you, Sergeant. I will take care of this immediately." With that, he left the office.

Catching a taxi, Harry went to the impound yard and paid the fees and signed over his title to the car. He then caught another cab and had it drop him at the out-of-order phone booth that was the entrance to the Ministry of Magic. He picked up the receiver and dialed the number.

"State your business."

"Lord Potter-Black, I need to see someone in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement." The badge came out of the coin return.

"Present your wand at the weighing station. Welcome Lord Potter-Black."

Harry went inside, checked in at the wand station, then proceeded to the DMLE office. He was surprised to see Madam Bones waiting for him when he arrived. He had not expected this, he thought that any Auror could help him.

"Lord Potter-Black, how can I help you today?"

"I just had something minor that I needed done, no sense in wasting the time of the Head of Department."

"You know what they say, R.H.I.P." At Harry's quizzical expression, she smiled. "Old muggle saying, but it applies here also. It means, 'rank hath its privileges'."

As they walked toward her office, Harry briefed her on the accident. "I really need to get this behind me, I can't be in disguise every time I go out into muggle London, and I would just as soon not be nicked for stealing and wrecking my own car."

Madam Bones smiled. "I don't see a problem, Lord Potter-Black. I will send over an Obliviator to remove the good Sergeant's memories of you, and we have a contact who can make the accident photos and the file disappear." They entered her office and she closed the door. "On a personal note, how are you holding up?"

"Honestly?"

"Of course. May I call you Harry? Your title is a mouthful."

"Madam Bones, all of my friends call me Harry. I would be honored to count you among that group."

"Then you must call me Amelia."

"Okay Amelia. I feel like I am running in place and losing ground. A few months ago, all I had to worry about was my O.W.L.s and the fact that a homicidal maniac had made it his mission in life to reunite me with my dead parents. Just another walk in the park," he said somewhat wryly. "Now I'm helping Professor McGonagall reorganize the school, trying to manage 2 properties by myself, never mind that I also have other properties I have not even seen, such as the Potter family holdings. I have a staff of house elves who have a fondness for butterbeer and portrait Quiddich who get really nasty when they are hung over, I wrecked my car by not knowing that the blasted signet rings are disguised portkeys. And I STILL have not been able to find the time to eat breakfast this morning!" Add to that the fact that

I am at the beck and call of the Wizengamot, and you can see that I am just a bit overwhelmed. In fact, I have been feeling somewhat like a duck."

Seeing Amelia's puzzled look, Harry explained. "On the surface, I may appear to be calm and collected, but underneath, I'm having to paddle like crazy."

Amelia laughed at the mental picture. "Why don't you make it easy on yourself? Have your solicitor hire a property manager to take care of your different holdings, and have the goblins deliver your earnings statements to the solicitor. Then go back to school and enjoy the new system that you created. I, for one, am interested how this House experiment of yours will turn out. The other thing is your seat at the Wizengamot. Just because you are summoned, that does not mean that you have to drop everything and go. Keep a house elf handy and when you are summoned, have him find out what the agenda for the Wizengamot meeting entails. If it is something that is not critical, pass on the meeting. That is what many members do if they are working. If it is that important, there will be a quorum in order to conduct business."

Harry was relieved. "You mean that I don't necessarily need to attend all of those meetings?"

"Merlin, no. Didn't you notice the times that you were there that there were empty seats?" Harry nodded. "Those missing members did not feel it necessary to be present. Its not as if they will fire you if you don't show up. In fact, when you have something important at school or home, just take the ring off and put it in safekeeping. Now all of that aside, I think that I can help you with another problem."

"Oh? What would that be?"

"It's a bit late for breakfast, but let me buy you lunch."

"Amelia, I believe that I will take you up on that."

A/N: I know that it is going a bit slow, but I plan to get Harry back aboard the Hogwarts Express soon. Next up, Dinner with the Dumbledores!

Chapter 9

Machiavellian Designs

Gringotts Bank, 203rd Level

Boardroom

As the Board of Directors sat down, the Chairman, Goldblood, motioned over the secretary who kept the minutes.

"Your presence will not be required for the next half hour." Goldblood did not want the topics that they would be discussing on the record, no one other than the goblins present needed to be in on the discussion.

"Yes, sir." The secretary was not surprised, this was a common occurrence. He gathered his Dicto-quill and parchment, then quickly left the room. Once he had left, the Board looked at Goldblood expectantly.

"The first item of interest in the unofficial agenda is the Potter-Black situation. Is Flickaxe present?"

"Yes, your Bloodiness." Flickaxe stepped forward nervously. He was only about 2/3 the size of the normal Board members, and only about half the size of the Chairman. Flickaxe was concerned that he might be removed as the account manager of the Potter-Black holdings due to his inability to talk Lord Potter-Black out of transferring the holdings of the Dumbledore vault back to the Dumbledore family. There were only two ways to lose account manager status, either the wizards would fire them or the Board would fire them. Both options included being roasted and served as entrees for after-meeting dinners. That and being cut into strips and made into jerky treats. It had been the unfortunate former account manager of the Dumbledore vault who Flickaxe had been nibbling on during his

meeting with Harry the previous week. He certainly did not want to be a snack for Griphook in the coming week.

"Flickaxe, this Board is disappointed that you were unable to keep the Dumbledore holdings within the Potter-Black account." Flickaxe felt a wave of panic, however he was completely unprepared for what came next. "We have, however taken into consideration that the Wizard, Potter-Black is an immature, emotionally disturbed individual. Since the Dumbledores did not pull their holdings out of the Bank, we still have control over them. We also have the problem that there is, at the present time, no account manager overseeing the Dumbledore account. This board has decided to entrust you with the management of both the Potter-Black and the Dumbledore accounts. The announcement will be formalized when we convene the regular meeting. We do expect great things from you in the near future. We have chosen Harry Potter-Black to be our tool in the Wizengamot in order to get these ridiculous anti-goblin laws repealed. In order to do this, he will need allies in both Light and Dark communities. More than allies, he will need blood ties. Right now, he has no heirs. He will need both Light and Dark heirs for the long range plan. This Board expects you to assist in setting up favorable conditions for this to happen. All other account managers have been instructed to assist you in this endeavor. We expect weekly reports on your progress. You may now leave."

"Thank you, Your Bloodiness. I will do as you have instructed." At this point, Flickaxe bowed, and when he stood back up, he had grown almost 6 inches in height, showing his new position and responsibility.

"Send the secretary back in as you leave." Flickaxe nodded and left as quickly as he could, glad to have avoided being a snack.

Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's office

Twenty minutes later

"And that was it, Griphook. I will need your help in this scheme. Did you manage to put the surveillance equipment into Potter-Black's properties?"

"Yes, sir. When we put up all of the new wards at the properties, we installed both sound and vision monitoring. We also refreshed the spells on the Dumbledore monitoring equipment when we reset the wards for the new Lord Dumbledore."

"Good, good. Let's see what we have then." Flickaxe hit a button on his desk and a large vidscreen appeared from behind the paneling in his office. He keyed in the Potter-Black account number and a picture of Black Manor came up on the screen. Somewhere in the back of his mind there was a tiny disturbing thought that he had made an error in judgment, something to do with the monitoring devices, but he could not get a grasp on just what it was. He dismissed the thought, chalking it up to the nerve-wracking experience he had just gone through at the informal Board meeting. He turned his attention back to the screen, where Harry was giving instructions to his House elves.

"I want everything perfect for tonight. I am having the Dumbledores over for dinner and I want to make a really good impression on them. Aberforth hates me, doesn't believe that his brother could have possibly done the things that he was convicted of, but I don't know how his heir thinks. He is bring along his sister and possibly his mother, so I want everyone on their best behavior. Understood?" There was a chorus of "Yes Lord Black," from the elves.

"That's another thing. Since this is a Light family, for tonight, address me as Lord Potter-Black. These kind of things matter nowadays."

"Yes, Lord Potter-Black," came the chorus. With that, Harry turned

and went into his study. Flickaxe changed monitoring devices, but all he saw was Harry sitting at his desk alone, making notations on parchment. He decided to look in on the Dumbledores.

Jonathon Dumbledore, much like Harry, was sitting at his desk making notes on parchments. Flickaxe had switched monitoring devices several times in order to find him in the large empty house. He was just about to turn off the monitor when the fireplace glowed and Violet Dumbledore appeared and stepped out of the fireplace. A moment later, she was followed by Jennifer, who also stepped gracefully out of the floo. Flickaxe snickered, remembering Lord Potter-Black's lack of grace when using the floo. He tended to exit the fireplace like a tenpin ball, with roughly the same result. He briefly wondered if he should tell Potter-Black the proper way to exit the floo, then decided not to, the entertainment value of Harry's exits were too valuable.

"Good afternoon Mother, Jennifer. I am a bit surprised to see you back so soon. Were there problems?"

"Problems? Yes, you might say that. We were treated like pariahs all day! Every damned shopkeeper in Diagon Alley said 'Dumbledore' like it was some sort of curse word. I knew that it would be difficult, but I never knew that the wizarding world would turn its back on us like this. Uncle Albus should have left those ungrateful bastards to suffer under Grindlwald!"

"Mother! Calm down! The quicker I build an alliance with Potter-Black, the sooner we can begin to undermine him and reclaim Uncle Albus' reputation. Remember the endgame. We will have to put up with a lot, but we WILL regain our place."

"Potter!" Violet sneered. "He's the one I can't figure out. He breaks our family, then hands us back our inheritance. The high and Mighty Lord Potter-Black, handing the pauper Dumbledores what he stole from them in the first place. I will not be going with you to dinner at

that bastard's house tonight. I don't think that I could resist shoving a knife in his back."

Flickaxe was not really paying that much attention to Violet Dumbledore's ramblings. He was too busy watching the reactions of the daughter, Jennifer. The girl did not have the open hatred of Violet Dumbledore on her face, nor the chameleon face of her brother, bland at one point, scheming at others. Jennifer though had an open, honest face. She appeared to be dominated by her mother and brother. This was surely something to be taken note of. She had not spoken since arriving home.

"Mother, Jon, if it is alright with you, I would like to take my purchases up to my room."

"Of course, dear. Get all of your school supplies put away, then hang your new dress robes up so that they won't get wrinkled before you get ready to go to dinner." With that, Jennifer took her parcels and left the room.

After she has gone, Jonathon spoke. "Mother, do you really think that it is wise to send Jennifer to Hogwarts? She is not nearly as cunning or as tough skinned as she could be."

"This is the perfect time to send her. With Potter's new house, or rather 'dorm' model, no one will be able to get any idea of what she might be like. I think that Potter has helped design the method of his own destruction at Hogwarts. Think what a disaster it would be if she were sorted into Slytherin or even Hufflepuff. She would have to deal with people's automatic assumptions. This way, the only thing that will hold her back is her name, and I should hope that we still have enough friends at Hogwarts to help her. And if you can get in close to Potter, he may protect her and shield her from the worst of it."

"Mother, I plan to get as close to Potter as a brother. Are you sure that Jennifer has not gotten any hints of her part in the plans?"

"Of course she hasn't. Jennifer is a sweet witch, but she has no idea how the world really works. We should just continue to allow her to live normally, all the rest will take care of itself. Now, if you don't mind, I am going to lay down a bit."

After Violet left the room, Flickaxe sat back and pondered what he had just seen. He shut down the visual monitor and stored it away behind the panel. He then drew out the memory of the visuals he had just seen and stored them in the vials for storage. He had quite a bit to think about.

Black ManorHouse

Later that evening

The fireplace glowed green, then Jonathon Dumbledore stepped into the sitting room, followed closely by his sister, Jennifer. Both of them made graceful exits from the fireplace. Harry shook his head in wonder.

"I just do not see how you do that. Every time I use the floo or a portkey, I end up in a pile on the floor." Jonathon cocked his head quizzically.

"Did no one ever tell you that travel by floo or portkey requires no action on your part?"

"No."

Jennifer stepped forward. "When you use the floo, wait until you have completely arrived at your destination prior to moving. Throw your floo powder in, then step in and do not move. Call out your destination, then wait until you have completely finished moving before you step out. Just make sure that you don't hold your body too stiff. It is the same concept with a portkey. Relax, then wait until you

have fully arrived before you move. Apparation is the only mode of travel that you can do while moving, if that makes any sense to you."

Harry thought of all of the times he had traveled by floo and portkey, how he had attempted to keep moving. "Actually, it does. I am looking forward to doing the thing correctly. Welcome to my home." He shook hands with Jonathon, then brought Jennifer's hand up and lightly brushed it with his lips. "May I offer you a drink before dinner?"

"Cognac, if you have any," Jonathon said. "I developed a taste for it last year while I was in France."

"Butterbeer for me," said Jennifer.

Harry called for Blinky. "Hennessey cognac for Lord Dumbledore and butterbeers for Miss Dumbledore and myself." The house elf popped out, then reappeared with the requested drinks. The three took their drinks, then sat down to talk until dinner was served.

This was one of those times that Harry was glad to have the friendly portrait of the Blacks. Mrs. Black had drilled him for the past week on the etiquette that was a part of every pureblood child's formative years. It was an intricate dance that the purebloods went through whenever they entertained, and there was no difference between Light and Dark families in this respect. There were purebloods who did not follow the forms, but they were the commoners, such as the Weasleys. Any pureblood family who held a seat in the Wizengamot were the equivalent of Noble's in the House of Lords. The commoners tended to run small businesses and hold mid to high level Ministry posts. Ministers of Magic and department heads were normally commoners, with the Wizengamot holding the ultimate veto power over laws and regulations. The Wizengamot could also introduce and pass laws without regard to the Minister, as they had the power to appoint and remove the Ministers with a simple majority vote. This system, designed to give lip service to the commoners while in reality keeping them in check, was one that was ripe for

abuse. The acquisition and retention of this power was one of the few things that Light and Dark nobility were united in.

Blinky stepped into the room. "Lord Potter-Black, dinner is served in the main dining room."

"Thank you, Blinky." Turning to his companions, Harry held out his hand to Jennifer. "Shall we take this conversation to the dining room?"

The house elves had outdone themselves. There was a grand roast beef, fresh vegetables from the greenhouses, lightly seasoned with fresh herbs, and soft Italian style bread. The staff had been waiting for this day in order to show their master their skills. The meal finished with fresh strawberries and melon balls in a light syrup with whipped cream. During their dinner, they had spoken about politics, the differences between foreign boarding schools and Hogwarts, anything and everything but the 800 kilo elephant in the middle of the room, namely the situation with Albus Dumbledore and his brother Aberforth. This evening was simply a starting point to find out if either of the parties had open hostility toward the other. Harry found himself liking Jonathon, and was enchanted by Jennifer. He would have never thought that these two could be related to the crafty Albus or the rough hewn Aberforth. After dinner and more conversation over cognac and butterbeers, it was time for the Dumbledore siblings to leave.

"I'm sorry that your mother could not make it tonight."

"Yes, she was very stressed out after her shopping trip today and decided that she would not make very good company. Possibly some other time," said Jonathon. The siblings walked over to the fireplace, Harry once again shook hands with Jonathon and kissed Jennifer's hand, then the pair left.

"Well done, young man." Harry spun around to see the recently

re-hung portrait of Phineas Black. Now that Dumbledore was out of the way, Harry had no problems with allowing the former Headmaster's portrait back into circulation. He brought the painting from 12 Grimmauld Place to the manor, intending to tap the wisdom of one of the greatest Headmasters that Hogwarts had ever produced. When he stood up on Harry's side at the Governor's meeting, Harry knew that he had found an ally.

"Thank you, sir. Did Blinky read the letter to you that I sent to the parents about the new sorting policy?"

"Yes he did. I believe that you hit just the right note. Many of the former Slytherin students will be upset, but you cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. I think that they will probably end up keeping many of the same cliques, but in a few years they will all be gone and the new students will not remember any other way of doing things. I only wish that I had the support to bring in something like this when I was Headmaster."

"That eases my mind quite a bit, sir." Just then, Blinky stepped up and pulled on the edge of Harry's robe to get his attention.

"Lord Black, an owl just came in for you, but it would not let Blinky take the letter." The elf looked abashed.

"Where is the owl now?"

"It is in Lord Black's study." Bidding Phineas good-night, Harry followed the elf into his study where a regal looking sooty owl was waiting on the back of Harry's chair. It held out its foot, waiting for Harry to take the letter.

"Has this been checked out"

"Yes, Lord Black. There is no portkey or any dangerous substances, just a letter."

"Very well." Harry took the letter and opened it and read:

Lord Potter-Black:

I need to speak with you before you leave for Hogwarts. I believe that I have information that will interest you. Please send back your reply with this owl.

Sincerely,

DM

Harry sat back, somewhat gobsmacked. DM could only be Draco Malfoy. What in the world would the bad boy of Slytherin need to relay to him? The history between the two naturally led him to believe that anything that Malfoy would be up to would be against Harry's best interests. Still, Harry's interest was piqued. He took a piece of parchment and wrote a reply.

DM:

You have my interest. You may come here at 8 o'clock tomorrow evening. The floo password is "Walburga's House. Come alone and leave your wand at home.

HP-B

Folding the letter and sealing it, he gave it to the owl and sent it on its way. He would contact Madam Bones in the morning and ask for a couple of Aurors to come to the Manor in the event that Draco did not follow instructions to come alone and unarmed.

"BLINKY!" The elf popped in.

"How can Blinky serve Lord Black?"

"Can you shut down the floo access at will?"

"Oh, yes sir. When would you like for Blinky to do that?"

"Right now. Shut it down for the night and hook it back up when I get out of bed tomorrow. How long does it take to do it?"

Blinky snapped his fingers. "It is done now, Lord Black."

Harry smiled. "I have a guest coming over tomorrow night and I will be wanting you to shut down the floo as soon as he comes through it. Can you take care of that?"

"Oh, yes sir! Will there be anything else?"

"Have someone lay out my pajamas and bring me some of that cognac that Lord Dumbledore seemed to enjoy so much tonight." The elf popped out and returned with Harry's nightcap. Harry thanked the elf, then dismissed him. He took the goblet, swirled the cognac around, and meditated about what Malfoy could possibly want from him.

Chapter 10

New Paradigms

Potter Redoubt

Godric's Retreat

This was the first time that Harry had visited the ancestral home of the Potter family. He had been spending all of his time at the two main Black properties, 12 Grimmauld Place and Walburga's House. His new property manager, Walden Pinklowe had suggested that he at least visit the other properties to decide what he wanted done with them.

As he toured the empty manse, he knew that he had somewhat of a lifestyle problem with all of these properties. As far as manor houses, just how many mansions could one person, or even one family, live in? They were not the kind of properties that a person could rent out for income, anyone who could afford to rent it could also afford to buy their own. For one moment, he had the insane thought to remove the magic from the house and sell it on the muggle market. Pinklowe quickly dissuaded him from that idea, suddenly putting an ancient 55 room mansion on 150 acres of land where none had ever existed before would bring up more questions than he could answer. At the present time, he was walking through the house with Pinklowe trying to decide what he should do with it.

"This place is filthy! What happened to all of the house elves?"

"Your grandparents were famous for taking in aged house elves that had been discarded by their families when they began getting a bit infirm. Between the time of your grandparent's deaths and now, all of the elves died. We found the corpses of elves, all dead of natural causes, in over 20 different places. I hired a crew to bury them in the Elf cemetery on the southwest corner of the property."

"Well, the first thing is to get a staff in here to clean the place up, then I want a skeleton crew here to keep it up. I will have my administrator elf handle that. I will probably not be living here, or even visiting much, but I can't let it go any farther downhill. Should I need extra staff here, I will bring them with me from the other places. I believe that I will be having the goblins catalog everything in here with an eye toward moving a lot of it into the Potter vault. Now, you mentioned other properties, I believe?"

"Yes, you have a block of flats, 15 of them, in London, commercial properties in Diagon Alley and Downtown London, plus various single family homes throughout Great Britain. The commercial properties, the flats and the single family homes are being rented out. All except for the Diagon Alley properties are rented to muggles. You also have a vacant lot in Godric's Hollow and the recently acquired property in Surrey on Privet Drive."

"The Privet Drive property needs to have new wards put up, since I don't want to rent it out. I want the wards keyed to my magical signature, not like the old blood wards. I believe that I am going to have a use for it in the near future. Also hire an interior decorator to completely change the look inside. Keep nothing of the previous owners. I will give you their address to send their belongings to." Pinklowe made a note in his planner and nodded.

"I'll get started on that right away." With that, Pinklowe disappeared out of the mansion.

"Kreacher!" Harry's administrator elf popped in. "How can I serve you, My Lord?"

"I want you to get all staff elves from both houses who are not working at their full capacity and bring them here to start cleaning this place up. I also want you to acquire a skeleton crew, just cleaning elves, to remain here at all times. The elves that you acquire for this

house should go through official channels. They will wear uniforms with the Potter family crest and be ready to serve anyone, and I mean anyone who I happen to put here. Should I decide to spend time here, I will bring staff from the Black properties to work the kitchen. I do not foresee actually using this property for at least a few years, but I don't want it to deteriorate. Make sure all of the elves you get are fairly young. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Lord Black. I will have the new staff hired by tomorrow and the house in order by the end of next week. Does Lord Black have anything else for Kreacher?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. After the house is cleaned, I will be having someone in to catalog everything in the house, with an eye toward storing items off the premises and into the Potter family vault."

"We can do that, Lord Black. I can put together a list so that you can decide what you want to move out."

"In that case, make it so. Thank you, Kreacher." The little elf swelled up with pride.

"Lord Black is a great master! He thanks Kreacher!" The elf said this with a sense of wonderment.

Harry smiled inwardly. If Hermione could see him now, with staffs of house elves at three properties, she would disavow knowing him.

"Kreacher, I need to get back to the Manor. I will be having a visitor coming soon. Let me know later what you will need to get everything done. Just make sure that you leave the cooking staff wherever I happen to be." With that, Harry went to the fireplace, tossed in some floo powder, called out "Walburga's House," and disappeared into the floo system.

Black Manor (Walburga's House)

Later that evening

Harry sat across the room from the fireplace with his wand in his hand, laid next to his leg. The two Aurors he had requested from the MLEO stood on either side of the fireplace, wands pointed at the hearth. The fire turned green, then Draco Malfoy stepped out of the fireplace. He was immediately braced by the Aurors, who frisked him for any weapons while Blinky disabled the floo.

"He's clean, Lord Potter-Black. Should we stay in here?"

No, Go have a cup of tea and some scones in the dining room." Harry had a quick thought. "Wait up just a second. Malfoy, lift your sleeves." Draco did so, revealing unmarked forearms. "Good enough. You guys can get a bite until its time to reopen the floo. I have anti-apparation wards up, so unless you hear me being murdered, you can probably relax." Harry smiled at Draco over this, and surprisingly enough, Draco returned the smile, although his seemed pretty strained. The Aurors left the room to be pampered by his cooking elves.

"Blinky, please bring Mr. Malfoy and myself some refreshments. Warm Hennessey for me..." Harry cocked his head at Draco.

"Same for me. I might as well try something new." Blinky popped out, returning in just a minute with the drinks.

Draco sipped the cognac, and his eyes widened in appreciation. "Damn, this is good! Where do you get it?"

"Any muggle spirits shop. Don't worry, muggles may make it, but its not contagious." Harry snickered, seeing Draco's look at actually having muggle made products pass over his lips. After the elf had left, Harry got down to business. "I admit that I was a bit confused that you would contact me. We have not exactly been bosom buddies the

past few years."

"Coming to you was not my idea, it was my mother's." Seeing Harry's surprise, he went on. "My mother never wanted to be a Death Eater, she was just so intimidated by my father that she went along with him. She has reached the end of her fear though, since I am supposed to be marked in two days. My father may want to bow and scrape at that half-blood's feet, but I will never bow to him. Mother and I are related to the House of Black, you are the head of that house. I am coming to you for protection."

Harry was stunned. He had been an enemy of Malfoys for so long that he just naturally believed that Draco would serve Voldemort willingly. He thought of something else.

"Is it just you scheduled to get the mark?"

"No, it is most of the 6th year Slytherins. Pansy, Daphne Greengrass, Nott, Avery, Crabbe and Goyle. The only ones who want to go through it are Crabbe, Goyle, and Avery. The rest of us are looking for a way out. If we don't take it, we will be targets by our own parents. My father will disown me, so will the others fathers. We will then be in danger of being murdered."

"You know, Malfoy, last year if I had heard this, I probably would have just said that it sucks to be you. I am not sure what I can do, but I will help somehow. It may mean that you miss this school year at Hogwarts though. For right now though, I will need you to get hold of your friends who do not want to be marked and bring them here tomorrow." He thought about something. "No, that won't work. The house is under the Fidelus Charm. Instead, firecall me in the morning and I will set up a meeting place."

"Thanks, Potter."

They spent a bit more time chatting about the new sorting system at

Hogwarts, then Draco said his good-nights and left, followed by the Aurors. Just before the Aurors left, Harry gave them a message to pass onto Madam Bones.

He was just getting ready for bed when Blinky knocked on his door. "Lord Black, an owl came in with a letter for you. It gave me the letter and left." He held out an envelope.

Harry took the envelope and opened it.

Harry:

We are back at the Burrow. After the trial, Dad took us all to Romania to visit Charlie. He and Mum had a lot to think about, they were terribly disappointed in Dumbledore. They really had no idea what he was up to. Mum just kept crying about how she could have raised you and you wouldn't have had to go through the abuse at the Dursleys.

I am starting to get used to the fact that you are my cousin, but it still feels weird. Ginny is crushed. She was so stuck on you, now she finds out that you are a relative. She got sick to her stomach thinking about what could have happened if you two had gotten together and fallen in love, then found it out. I believe that she was in love with you already.

We have a lot to catch up on, can you call us or come over sometime before we leave for school?

Your cousin (that STILL sounds weird!)

Ron

Harry grinned, feeling his burdens lighten. He had been so worried for the Weasley family, the only real family he had ever known. It was a bit of a surprise about Ginny though. Sometimes he was really

dense when it came to girls. Scratch that, he was ALWAYS dense when it came to girls! Harry went over to his writing desk, jotted down a quick answer, then called Blinky to send it off with an owl.

His head filled with dueling thoughts and emotions, he got in bed for an uneasy sleep.

Gringotts Bank

The next morning

The goblins had set up a conference room for Harry to meet with the Slytherin students and Madam Bones. Since the fathers of the students were wanted Death Eaters, the students were in danger every minute that they were out of sight. If Voldemort or his followers got wind that the students did not want to become servants, their lives would not be worth a knut. There was also the problem that outside of their wealthy families, they had no protection or assets.

"If your fathers are arrested and convicted, your inheritances will probably be stripped and distributed among the Death Eaters victims. You will end up completely without support. Being related to the House of Black, Mr. Malfoy could ask for Harry's protection, but he would have no legal ability to do the same for the others. You would probably be disowned by your fathers, that would mean that you could not even inherit your titles and seats in the Wizengamot. You would be paupers." Madam Bones was giving them the worst case scenario.

"Better poor than dead," Draco said. The others nodded in agreement. "What about my mother?"

"Should she turn herself in and testify against the others, she can be granted Witness Protection status. This is actually an idea that we got from the American muggles. Their law enforcement uses that to help break up criminal gangs. She would probably want Harry to

annul her marriage to Lucius. She would then become a Black, subject to Harry's guardianship and protection."

"Let's wait to do that until Lucius is arrested, Madam Bones. I would hate for all of these guys to be punished for doing the right thing. How would you set up the arrest?"

"I will put tracking charms on them that they could activate when their fathers joined them. We would then overwhelm them with force and arrest them. Would you give them sanctuary after the arrest until everything is sorted out?"

"Absolutely! I can put them up at the Black Mansion. I will give you the coordinates and you can give them portkeys they can use as soon as the Aurors show up to arrest the parents. My house elves can take it from there."

"Very good. I will also make one for Narcissa if that is alright with you." Harry nodded in agreement and wrote down the coordinates of 12 Grimmauld Place. With that, the students and Madam Bones used the floo to go to the MLEO offices to have the tracking charms put on and the portkeys made. Harry stayed to thank the goblins and make some arrangements for further security.

After Harry left, Flickaxe and Griphook were discussing what had happened during the meeting. They had watched the entire thing, then put their memories of it in the vials.

"Griphook, if they do this thing, the bank will lose control of all of those vaults. The funds will be distributed among muggles and poor wizards, who will just spend it. There will also be several seats lost in the Wizengamot to people who could become Potter-Black's allies."

"What can we do about it?"

"The way I see it, we need to get the fathers out of the way before

they can be convicted. That way the estates will remain intact. We also cannot allow them to disown the children. Their heirs will owe Potter-Black their lives and their fortunes. What I want you to do is put together a crew that can piggyback the tracking charms, arriving with the Aurors. When the children portkey away, kill the parents, make it look like the Aurors did it. If you have to kill the Aurors, do it quickly and leave no survivors."

"May I make a suggestion?" When Flickaxe motioned for him to go ahead, Griphook spoke. "If we do it that way, they might still lose their inheritances. I suggest overriding the tracking charms so that we are notified first. We come in, kill the parents, stun the children and activate their portkeys. Then take the bodies of the parents, put them in a public place and set off the Dark Mark. That way it will look like Voldemort killed them. We will take their masks and cut off their limbs so that the Mark does not show."

Flickaxe sat back in his chair in shock. This Griphook character was one crafty goblin! He had better keep an eye on him or Griphook would be sitting in his chair having him for an afternoon snack.

"I like that plan. Go ahead with it. Griphook, I am going to put in a recommendation that you become the new account manager for the Malfoy account. I think that it is time that Screwtail be replaced. He has allowed the Malfoy wizards far too much freedom in putting the estate in danger. They have been giving large amounts to Voldemort, helping to keep the wizarding world in chaos. If you get this promotion, guide young Draco Malfoy wisely."

"Thank you, sir. May you kill your enemies and bathe in their gold." Griphook bowed and left.

Flickaxe let out his breath in relief. This would solve two problems. He would get the credit for saving the accounts, Griphook would be promoted and be so busy managing that account that he would not be able to undermine Flickaxe. Flickaxe and Griphook would dine on

Screwtail at Griphook's promotion party, and if Griphook screwed up on the account, Flickaxe would be snacking on him.

Life was good.

Chapter 11

Hostile Allies and Friendly Enemies

You-Know-Who Attacks Noble Families!

Guilt of Dark Families now in Doubt

Exclusive to The Daily Prophet

Miranda MacDugall, Staff Writer

Several Dark families, long suspected to be supporters of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, were attacked, the family Heads murdered in a most gruesome method last night. The bodies of the Heads of the Malfoy, Nott, Greengrass, Goyle, Avery, Crabbe, and Parkinson families were discovered in front of the Ministry of Magic by a passing muggle policeman. Their bodies had been dismembered and body parts were missing. Prior to being obliterated, the policeman stated that it was the worse massacre he had ever seen.

The fact that You-Know-Who killed these influential members of wizarding society brings into doubt recent charges that they were willing servants of the Dark Lord. It is the opinion of this reporter that the defense put forward several years ago that they had been under the Unforgivable Imperious curse may have been legitimate. The recent sightings of these men at Death Eater raids probably were the result of the same curse.

Since these men were so gruesomely slain probably means that they had bravely fought off the influence of the spell and were working toward the downfall of the Dark Lord. There will be a mass funeral on Friday with the Minister of Magic awarding the Order of Merlin, Second Class posthumously to their families. The new heads of the families are;

Draco Malfoy

Pansy Parkinson

Daphne Greengrass

Theodore Nott

Vincent Crabbe

Gregory Goyle

Robert Avery

These young wizards and witches are the future of the wizarding world. We should all follow the lead of their classmate and former rival, Lord Harry Potter-Black in extending the hand of friendship and support in their time of mourning. This reporter has been informed that the new young nobles are in seclusion at the home of Lord Potter-Black

12 Grimmauld Place

"Malfoy, just what in the hell happened out there? And why are your bookends and Avery here? I thought that they wanted to be marked!"

"I can't explain it either! One minute we were all with our fathers at the apparition point, the next We are all waking up here. I don't know who did it, but we were all stunned and apparently Crabbe, Goyle and Avery piggybacked on the portkeys somehow. I was waiting for the Aurors to arrive before portkeying, but I never got the chance to activate it myself. We just woke up in a tangle in the room here. And I thought that they were just supposed to be arrested, not murdered!"

"I have no idea what happened there, but the Aurors never arrived

before your parents were killed and the bodies taken away. Maybe Voldemort had an idea that something was up and decided to thin out his ranks some. Either that, or there is another force out there who is working against Voldemort. I will say that this changes a lot in the equation. You aren't poor, you are heirs of your estates. All in all, considering that your fathers would have probably been put to death anyway, you may have come out way on top of the game. You will have to somehow convince your mates who wanted to serve Voldemort that this is actually a good thing."

"I shouldn't think that it would be a problem with Goyle and Crabbe. Avery may be a completely different story. He actually has a few brain cells that are still joined together. I think that the best way will be to speak to his Slytherin side. He can be as big a thug as the apes, but I think that I can get him to see reason. If I can get him to believe that the Dark Lord was the one who killed everyone, then he will have to either join with us or run for cover. The Dark Lord has lost the majority of his funding in the past few hours."

"I hadn't thought of that. He is going to be majorly pissed when he figures it out. Why don't you call in the others and we can start laying down a plan of action."

Draco left the room and returned with his fellow Slytherins. Harry called for Blinky and had him take drink orders all around. Once the teens were seated, Draco took the floor.

"We're not sure just what happened out there, who killed our fathers or why. I do know that if Potter-Black had not helped us, we would all be wearing the Dark Mark and be bowing and scraping before the Dark Lord."

"And this is bad, how?" asked Avery.

"Avery, four of us decided that we were not going to suck up to that half blood monstrosity. If everything had gone to the original plan, our

fathers would be under arrest and we would be poor, but free. You three," he pointed at Crabbe, Goyle and Avery. "would have gone and gotten your dark marks and spent the rest of your lives, and I mean, the rest of your lives, being house elves to the Dark Lord and kissing his boots. Whenever you screwed up, you would be tortured. I have seen my father come home looking like an old man because he was bent over in so much pain. I know that you all have seen the same. The other thing that you need to know is this; when he dies, so will anyone else with the mark. I did some research on this. Potter-Black will probably kill him in a few years, and that would mean the end of you too. Whoever killed our parents actually did us a favor. We have attained a measure of power and influence. What we do with it is up to us. Do we use it to attain our goals, or do we throw it away following some maniac. Mark my words, if you throw in with this Dark Lord, you will die, and die soon."

"So, now we have to become a bunch of muggle and mudblood lovers?" Avery sneered.

"Don't be an idiot. No one has asked me to change my basic beliefs. But there is a place for mudbloods and mixed bloods in our society. If we did away with purebloods, we would have to dissolve the Wizengamot, since it requires the heads of Noble families to be pureblood. Whether that changes in the future, I don't know. Our inbreeding has begun producing more squibs and weak magical people. The Pureblood squib rate is over twice what the halfblood squib rate. But that is a battle for a different day. By working for the betterment of all of wizarding society, we will ensure our power and influence for many more generations to come. Our fathers gave up their political power when they were identified as Death Eaters. We can now take it back ourselves, make alliances where necessary and form a bloc of votes. We are young, we can stand in the Wizengamot for many decades."

"What kind of alliances?" asked Pansy.

Harry broke in. "When the Minister passes one of his idiotic laws or regulations, we have the ultimate veto over it. We do have to have enough votes to do that though. This is not an easy thing to do. The Minister is subject to political pressure not just from us, but from the entire wizarding world. With the correct alliances, we can head a lot of this off at the pass, making it easier to keep the idiot from stepping in it before hand. You guys ally with the Dark families, the Light families can ally with the commoners, and I can work with both of you. Between the Wizengamot and the commoners, we can keep the Minister on a short leash and actually make him work to all of our advantages. You don't have to grind other people down to rise yourself."

"Well," Avery said. "I'm willing to give it a try. Goyle, Crabbe, How about you?" The two thugs, who had been watching, not speaking, nodded.

"Good deal," said Malfoy. "If it doesn't work out for you, you can always throw away your power and become Voldemort's house elf. Now you guys really need to try some of Lord Potter-Black's cognac. This stuff is unreal!"

Gringotts Bank

Chairman Goldblood, Flickaxe and Griphook were sitting in the conference room watching the monitoring feed from Grimmauld Place. At the end of the teen's meeting, Goldblood reached over and shut down the monitor screen. He then turned to his underlings.

"You two pulled the bank out of a very embarrassing situation and saved six ancient accounts from being distributed to unworthy creatures. Your bold action bespeaks well of both of you. Griphook, Flickaxe has recommended that you become the new account manager for the Malfoy account. With your initiative, I find myself in agreement. I am going a step farther and also making you the account manager for the Parkinson account. Their fathers filed an

intent to betroth the children soon after their births. I do not know if they will go through with it since they are now their own House Heads, but if they do, it will be an active set of accounts. I will also be replacing the account managers on the other accounts of the former Death Eaters. Should you have anyone who you would like to put forward for these positions, send me a memo. Let me be the first to congratulate you, Griphook, on your promotion, and to say to both of you, job well done!"

"Thank you, your Bloodiness!" Griphook and Flickaxe bowed before the Chairman, extending their necks in the traditional sign of obedience in the event that Goldblood should want to behead them. Griphook had grown almost 6 inches, making him only 4 or 5 inches shorter than Flickaxe. "May you slay your enemies and bathe in their gold!"

Goldblood motioned for them to rise, then gave each a bone crushing pat on the back. "Back to work, good goblins! I will see you at Griphook's promotion feast. It looks like there will be plenty of food this time."

The Burrow

Hermione was visiting the Weasleys this evening, hearing about their trip to Romania and discussing the shocking events of the past few weeks. Since the end of the last term, their lives and everything that they believed had been turned on its head. The betrayal by Albus Dumbledore had affected everyone greatly. They had just started in a very lively debate on reasons for and against transferring from Hogwarts when the fireplace glowed green and Harry's head appeared.

"May I come through?"

"Of course, Harry!" Mr. Weasley exclaimed.

A moment later, Harry appeared in the fireplace and gracefully stepped out. This surprised everyone since they had all moved out of the way for Harry's normal rolling entrance.

"Bloody hell, Harry. When did you learn how to do that?"

"Just a few days ago. A nice young lady told me that using the floo is not a full contact sport." Just then, Harry disappeared into the embrace of a weeping Mrs. Weasley.

"Oh, Harry. I'm so sorry that you had to deal with all of this. Can you ever forgive us?"

"Mrs. Weasley, there is nothing to forgive. You were hurt as much as I was. For all of those years, you thought my mother was someone else, that your cousins were dead. Dumbledore fooled a lot of people, put the blame where it belongs."

"Please, Harry, call me Molly. We are relatives, after all." Molly finally let Harry go. "This is the first time that you have come here looking like you have actually eaten."

"That is probably because I have. I have a wonderful cooking staff that is almost as good as you. But it takes all 8 of them in the kitchen to even come close. They, of course, cannot do as good a job as you, but I eke by."

"Flattery will get you everywhere." Molly blushed. "Let me put on a fresh pot of tea. Would you like something to eat? Maybe some nice chocolate biscuits?"

"Sounds wonderful."

Hermione had been processing what Harry had been saying. "Harry, please don't tell me that you have enslaved elves."

"Mione, don't start. I have elves as part of my household. They are treated well, have days off, and I buy them whatever they tell me they need or even want. Should any of them want freedom, I would grant it immediately. But they are part of my family. They may be better looking in some cases, but they have been a great help. I have 2 huge properties that have to be tended at all times, plus the house at Grimmauld Place. And the biggest surprise is Kreacher. He is not insane, although he does have a really warped set of values and sense of humour. He is my head elf, he is now neat and tidy, and he has been invaluable in helping me keep everything running. Much better than the 'house muggle' experiment that I tried." At their quizzical look, Harry told them the tale of Vernon and Dudley.

"Oh, gawd! That is just too good! Blinky's reaction was precious." This was from Ginny, who had come downstairs just as Harry was beginning to relate the tale.

"Yes, but the funniest thing is that Mrs. Black thinks that I should try the experiment again, this time using a better class of muggles. I don't think I could get something like that through the Wizengamot though. The Light wizards would be against it on moral grounds, and the Dark families would be jealous that they hadn't thought of it first."

Molly Weasley came back into the room with the tea and biscuits, and they all dug in. After a few minutes of small talk, Harry cleared his throat.

"One of the things that I think we need to talk about is Percy." Harry swore that he felt the room drop several degrees in temperature.

"That prat!" Ron exploded.

"Yes, that 'prat, who happens to be your brother. Look, he was wrong about me, and he is still trying to fit inside Fudge's pocket, but he was absolutely right about Dumbledore. Whether it was his opinion or Fudge's that he was parroting, he was right. And he was brave

enough to risk his place in the family to try to warn all of you." Turning to Arthur and Molly, Harry continued. "I know that he hurt you deeply, but I believe he had your best interest at heart. I am willing to forgive him what he said about me, and I don't really know him that well. Arthur, he is your son, and although I don't know my father, one thing that I have always believed is that a father never really rejects his son, no matter how far off the track that child goes. And Molly, you carried him for 9 months, then fed him at your breast for a long time after that. I remember how proud you were of him when he got his high O.W.L. scores and then when he made Head Boy. Can either one of you continue turning your back to him when he was, in his own way, looking out for your best interests? He only struck out when he was frustrated."

Molly was openly crying. "H-harry, I want him back, but he doesn't want to come back."

"Harry, he doesn't deserve it. He talked to Dad like he was a dog." Ron was furious. "How dare you come in and make Mum and Dad feel worse about it than they already do."

"Ron, now you are being the arse! The reason that Percy has not made amends with your parents is that you and your brothers have made it clear that he is not welcome! Because you won't forgive your own brother, your blood, he has stayed away and it has hurt your parents worse than the original problem. Ginny, would you forgive Percy?"

"Of course. Percy is the only brother who ever really understood me. He helped me with my school work, he was a friend in my first year when Ron, you and Hermione ignored me and treated me like I was not even there. I miss him terribly, and I am the only one who he has kept in contact with."

"You kept in contact with him after all he did?" Ron was aghast.

"Of course I did, you idiot! He is my brother, no matter what he has done. Harry is right. He would have come back here to set things right with Dad and Mum if he hadn't thought that you and the twins would murder him when he came in the door. Or at least seriously injure him. You five boys are the most pig-headed, stubborn, unforgiving prats that ever wore the name Weasley! And I would rather spend an hour with Percy than five minutes with you, Ronald Bilius Weasley! You should be ashamed of yourself!" Harry grabbed her hand just as she was getting ready to pull out her wand for some serious brother-hexing.

"Whoa, Ginny. Calm down. Look," Harry addressed the whole family. "You guys are my only real family. Now that I know you really are family, I don't want to lose any of you, especially due to something as stupid as this whole thing. I know that Percy owes apologies all the way around, but he was not completely in the wrong. I would bet that if you guys can see past your own wounded pride, so can he. After all, he is a Weasley, through and through. And by the way, Hermione, I also consider you family... my informally adopted sister." Hermione, who had been feeling a bit left out, hugged Harry.

"I'm willing to try, if only for Dad and Mum's sake," said Ron. "I will also talk to the twins, but they are going to be a lot harder sell."

"Good. I want to have all of you over to the Manor house for dinner tomorrow. It can be considered neutral territory. We don't have much time before we leave for school, so be as persuasive as you can. You might want to tell the twins that.." Harry snickered, "The Might Lord Potter-Black, their main, and only investor and cousin to both sides of the Weasley family, really wants them to at least try to bury the hatchet."

The whole family laughed at that. "I'll do that, but I think that I had better phrase the request a bit differently or they will bring along real hatchets, and I would hate to think of where they would try to bury them."

When Harry was getting ready to say his good-nights, Ginny took him aside. "Harry, may I speak with you privately?"

"Of course, Ginny. Should we go out to the garden?" At her nod, Harry escorted her out.

"Harry, that was a wonderful thing that you did." Ginny turned and gave Harry a kiss, surprising him.

"Uh, Ginny, I heard that you were pretty upset about this whole thing, finding out that we were relatives."

"Yes, I was. Harry, I have had a crush on you from before we even met. But I just had to realize that you never returned the feeling. This is actually liberating, but it still hurts. On one hand, I don't have to try to impress you and maybe get my heart broken. On the other, I can't think of anything sweeter than being your girlfriend. I try to say that I will miss trying to woo you, but you can't really miss what you never had."

Harry took Ginny's hands in his and looked her in the eyes. "Ginny, I admit that I have felt attraction to you, and even jealousy when you were dating other guys. Under any other circumstances, I can't think of anyone who I would like to be with more. But I have to admit that I have never really had the romantic feelings for you or the crush on you that you had for me. I have never really dated, you can't count Cho bawling all over me a real relationship. Given time, I may have ended up loving you that way, but under the circumstances, it would lead to disaster. I can't help but feel that the guy who wins the heart of Ginny Weasley will be the luckiest guy in the world. And if he upsets you too much, the most endangered guy in the world. Six brothers and a cousin who adore you, along with a wicked bat bogey hex, would keep any guy in line."

Ginny laughed, a high, clear musical sound that brought joy to Harry.

"Now, cousin Lord Potter-Black, terror of evildoers and puppetmaster of the Wizengamot, shall we rejoin the family before they report us as missing in action?"

"Miss Weasley, cousin to the Great and Terrible Lord Black, master of house muggles and pushover for Quiddich loving, butterbeer drinking elves, I believe that would be a grand idea.

Giggling insanely, the pair went back in the house, Harry to floo home and Ginny to dream of what might have been.

Chapter 12

Back to School (Pt 1)

12 Grimmauld Place

It was two days after the dinner at Potter Redoubt with the Weasley family. The meeting between Percy and his family had started out with attitudes on the slightly homicidal and gradually mellowed to the point of grudging acceptance. The final healing between the family members came after Percy had apologised to Harry. Harry then pulled out a battered leather bound book and opened it to read a story to the Weasleys.

"When I lived with the Dursleys as a young child, they would drag me off to their church. I think that they believed that if I accepted their religion, that when I found out about magic, I would reject it. What they did not expect was that the pastor would tell these great stories of love, then I would see what hypocrites they were. They actually quit going to their church because there was not enough 'hellfire and damnation' rhetoric that would condemn me rather than them."

"There is a great story about family love in this book though. It is called the Prodigal Son. It is a story about a son who made all of the wrong choices while his brother made all of the right ones." Harry then began to read the story. At the end of his recitation, there was not a dry eye in the house. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley saw the situation through the eyes of the father of the prodigal and the brothers compared their attitudes against the unforgiving attitude of the older brother. This brought more than a little shame. Percy was the most affected though. He told Harry later that he had often felt like the repentant son, but was never brave enough to return and beg forgiveness. In the end, the family kissed and made up, then spent the next few hours exploring the Potter ancestral home before heading back to the Burrow. He then floo-ed back to Walburga's House to check on his Slytherin classmates, told them that he would

see them in the morning, then went back to Grimmauld Place.

As he stepped out of the fireplace, Harry was greeted by Walburga and Orion's portrait. The two had become very pleasant conversation companions with valuable advice. The added bonus with the Grimmauld Place Blacks was that Walburga could access memories of her older self, one much more versed in the customs of the purebloods than her younger counterpart and her husband. Since he had not visited Grimmauld Place in a while, he brought them up to date on the situation of his classmates.

"It is obvious what the next step is, My Lord. You need to take them to the Wizengamot and have them seated. I believe that you should call your solicitor in the morning and call for a meeting for tomorrow afternoon. They should be seated before you return to Hogwarts. If they are not, you will have to do without their political support until such time as they can be seated. You will probably need to contact the goblins at Gringotts to make sure that they have their house rings. With them seated, you should have those seven plus the new Lord Dumbledore as allies. A bloc of their votes plus your two gives you 10 votes in the Wizengamot for anything that you want to do. The Malfoy money that is now being kept away from the Minister should also make him more pliable to other persuasions that your bloc may wish to dangle. I did not know Fudge for very long before I passed on, but I do remember that he was an obnoxious, money grubbing little cretin, and he was very afraid that he would lose his post. That is why Lucius kept him on a short tether. I would suggest that you do the same."

"The only problem that I see is that we are supposed to leave for school tomorrow morning. I can't see getting everything done in time."

"Posh. That is what the goblins are for. Tell them what you want to do and have them arrange a portkey to Hogsmead. You can arrive there in the afternoon and enjoy a day in the village until the train pulls in.

You can then join your classmates for the carriage ride to the school. It really is not a good idea to ride the Express anyway. Having 8 members of the Wizengamot on a train that is susceptible to attack is just asking for trouble. While you are at it, you should also arrange for some private security for your group. You and your friends are a politically powerful group and the world is a dangerous place. It is only fitting that you should have the best."

"But I don't want to lord it over the other students. I have had a hard enough time fitting in as it is."

"Nonsense. What you have is a large target painted on your back. The wizarding world wants you to be their savior, you must insist on the security and training to live through it. Hire tutors in the subjects where you are weak. You also need your own Potions Master to make sure that someone does not try to 'accidentally' poison you when you are incapacitated. Also have trusted house elves see to your personal needs. There are provisions in the Hogwarts charter for Heads of Houses to have appropriate quarters and staff. Use the rules for your benefit. This House just got a worthy Lord, we don't want to lose you."

"Okay, okay! I will take your advice. I think for now though, I had better get to bed." With that, Harry bade the Blacks good-night and headed up to bed.

Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's office

Flickaxe turned off the screen and sat back in his chair. Things were moving quickly, but in the right direction. He summoned his new assistant, a small goblin named Warcry, and sent him off in search of the various house rings that Lord Potter-Black would be needing for his new allies. He then put in a request to the Ministry for a password activated portkey to take the new Lords and Ladies to Hogsmeade.

Flickaxe was nothing if not efficient. He then turned the screen back on so he could see what was happening with the students staying at Walburga's House. It had been quite a feat getting in a crew to plant the monitoring devices at that manor. The tech-goblins had been discovered by a house elf who had raised an alarm, and the crew had to do memory charms on every elf in the house. Although goblin magic was not completely effective on house elves, they had still planted the devices and gotten away. Every so often though, one of the elves would look directly at the invisible devices and scowl as if trying to remember something, then turn away in puzzlement. He made a note to send in more memory experts in the event that any of them appeared to remember things that they shouldn't. He surely did not want things to get out of hand with house elves, they could be as fierce as goblins when it came to protecting their masters, and they had some magics that goblins couldn't defend against. It was a good thing that the goblins had come up with the spell over a thousand years ago that literally changed the DNA of the elves to make them totally dependant on their wizards or they would probably be running the bank and he would be in a tunnel somewhere mining gold. It was then that Warcry returned.

"Sir, I have all of the house rings in this box. Will there be anything else?" The little goblin was nervous, he had just been transferred in from a greeter's position the other day and was still trying to get a handle on the moods and habits of his new supervisor.

"Not now. By the way, did you hear what happened to my last assistant?" Flickaxe gave an ear splitting grin, showing multiple rows of teeth.

"N-no sir." Warcry was really nervous now. He figured that the last assistant had become a snack for the more powerful goblin, that was the normal result of a 'transfer'. As in transfer from a desk to a platter.

"He did a great job and I recommended a promotion. He is now an important account manager. If you serve me as faithfully as he did,

that could also happen to you."

Warcry was stunned. This was not the way he had expected an important account manager to behave. It was a goblin-eat-goblin world! Underlings were supposed to undercut their superiors and the superiors would watch and wait for the underlings to screw up so that they could step on their well-roasted carcasses on their way up the corporate ladder. He decided at this point that whatever Flickaxe wanted, he would provide. All while watching him closely in the event that when and if Flickaxe did screw up, he, Warcry would make sure that his tail was covered."

"Sir, I look forward to serving you for a long time."

Life was good

Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's Office

The next morning

"So, let's see if I have it all. You are going to call a special session of the Wizengamot to have the new Lords and Ladies inducted, then you will need transportation to Hogsmead?" Flickaxe looked at the group in his office. Along with Lord Potter-Black, there was his solicitor, George Steinman, and the 7 new Heads of House. "I believe that can be managed easily. Is there anything else that we can help you with?"

Steinman leaned forward. "I believe that since the group will be at Hogsmead for several hours prior to joining the other students, that there should be some sort of security arrangements."

Flickaxe nodded. "That seems like a good idea. Eight members of the Wizengamot traveling together would be quite a tempting target

for someone with bad intentions. Especially new members whose fathers were not exactly in the good graces of the public. It would also be possible that a certain Dark Lord might want to make good on his intention to mark these young people. I know for a fact that he is hurting for money right now. With the loss of seven affluent families, his funding has pretty much dried up. I would think that 4 Auror trained security wizards should do the trick. We will set them up with portkeys in the event that you need to clear out of the area quickly. The portkeys will be set for my office, and I will ask the Headmistress for permission to allow floo connections to her office in the event that they are needed. Should we charge this to your vault Lord Black, or spread the cost among the 8 of you?"

Draco stood up. "I am willing to carry my share, how about you guys?" He looked at the others, who nodded their assent.

Warcry took that moment to pop in the door with the house rings recovered from the various vaults. He quickly passed them out to the waiting students. As they each put the rings on, they were automatically sized for their fingers, showing that the rings accepted their claims of Headship.

Flickaxe was writing on a parchment. "Lord Potter-Black, I have taken the liberty of writing a message to the Keeper of the Door for the Wizengamot calling for a meeting. You will need to impress your ring into the wax seal, then I will send it over. Will 11am be alright? That will give you 2 hours to prepare."

"That will be perfect. Does anyone want to do any shopping or anything?" The girls brightened. "I'll take that as a yes. Will it be alright to use the bank's floo connection to get us to the ministry?"

"Of course, Lord Potter-Black." Flickaxe gave Harry a small business card. "Just show this to the greeter goblin and he will see that you get on your way. Would anyone like to go to their vaults?" All of the students other than Harry raised their hands. "In that case, I will have

Warcry here take you. Lord Potter-Black, could I speak with you a moment? And Mr. Steinman, you should also be here."

The other students left to go retrieve money from their vaults, and Flickaxe turned to Harry and his solicitor. "Lord Black, no one knows more than we here at the bank just how much you mean to this war. Not only are you going to need the best defense and offense training available, you should also be trained in the workings of the magical government. I would like to suggest that you get tutors for the subjects that will round out your training. I realize that Hogwarts is a good school that turns out very competent wizards and witches, but they were never designed to train warriors or leaders of government. Normally the heads of house are raised in an environment where the lessons of leadership are drilled into them in such a way that when they do have to pick up the reins of leadership, it comes naturally. You have been deprived of that, but it is something that you need in order to get anything done in the Wizengamot. If you don't get this training, there will be people who will use you to their own ends. You have already experienced that with Dumbledore, you need to know how to prevent it from happening with other, more experienced members."

"What would you suggest?"

"Give me the authority to hire tutors for you. You can take whatever classes you think would be beneficial to you at Hogwarts, but do not take many classes. Leave the rest of your schedule open for advanced tutoring. As a Head of House, you have the absolute right to set the classes that you need. I would also suggest that you get together with your fellow new Lords and Ladies to take some of the tutoring together. You never know when you will need to watch each other's backs."

"It all sounds good, but what do you think, George?"

"I suggest that you take Flickaxe's advice. Let him evaluate what you

need by what you have already learned. Flickaxe, can you arrange for Harry to be tested once he is at Hogwarts?"

"Certainly. I will contact the Headmistress and set up a time for tomorrow. Lord Black, I will need your permission to access your O.W.L. records." Flickaxe took a prepared parchment and handed it to Harry to sign and emboss with his ring. "Now, I believe that your friends are back from their vaults. I will speak with you tomorrow at Hogwarts. The security detail will meet you at the Wizengamot after the meeting."

Ministry of Magic

Chambers of the Wizengamot

"Oyez, Oyez! This special meeting of the Wizengamot is now in session! Chief Warlock Zabini presiding! All who have business before this body may now speak!" The Keeper of the Door finished his introduction and Harry stood up.

"Chief Warlock, I called this meeting in order for prospective new members to claim their rights. I yield the floor to the Solicitor George Steinman"

"Well spoken, Lord Potter-Black. Mr. Steinman, you have the floor." Mr. Zabini looked down at Steinman. Zabini had grown into the job well, being unanimously elected as Chief Warlock following the Dumbledore trial. His reputation for fairness served him well.

"Thank you Grand Warlock, members of the Wizengamot. I represent seven news Heads of Most Noble and Ancient Houses. They are Lord Draco Malfoy, Lady Pansy Parkinson, Lady Daphne Greengrass, Lord Theodore Nott, Lord Vincent Crabbe, Lord Gregory Goyle, and Lord Robert Avery. They are the lawful Heads of the Most Noble and Ancient Houses that bear their names. They are here to claim their rights, their seats, and their votes in this Most

Honorable and August Body. As they are, at this time, minors, they are sponsored by Lord Potter-Black, whose emancipation is on file and recognized. Lord Potter-Black, in loco parentis, also sponsors the emancipation of these Heads of House. For this, we petition this Body."

"Well spoken, Sir Steinman. Does any member wish to co-sponsor the emancipation declarations of these Heads of House?"

"I, Lord Dumbledore, will also sponsor these Heads of House in their bids for emancipation." There was a stunned silence in the room. Harry had expected one of the Dark families to co-sponsor, he never expected a Light Lord, especially Dumbledore, to do so. This broke the ice. One by one, wizards and witches, both Light and Dark, stood to co-sponsor the seven.

"Well, it seems that everyone want to co-sponsor. I suppose that we should have a vote to satisfy rules though. All in favor?" There was a chorus of 'ayes'. "Opposed?" Silence. "In that case, the Ayes have it. Lords and Ladies, you are now, in the eyes of this government, adults, with all of the rights and responsibilities under law. Please raise your wands." As the seven raised their wands, all of the other members raised theirs.

"Do you, Lord Malfoy, Lord Goyle, Lord Crabbe, Lord Avery, Lord Nott, Lady Greengrass, and Lady Parkinson, vow to uphold the honor of this august body, protect and defend the wizarding world against all enemies, from within or without? If so, say 'I do'"

"I do," the seven new Lords and Ladies vowed.

"So mote it be! Welcome to this body. You may claim your seats."

The seven took their wands and, pointing them at empty chairs once held by their fathers, moved the seats on the Dark side of the assembly to the far right side, just as Dumbledore had previously

moved his to the light side closest to Harry. The new generation of Members then left the floor and made their way up the stairway to their seats, accepting handshakes all around. A few other small items of business that would have normally waited for a regularly scheduled meeting were quickly taken care of, then the meeting was adjourned.

Leaving the Wizengamot, the group met up with the security detail hired by the goblins. Harry took one look at them and whistled under his breath. These guys looked dangerous! Any Death Eater who would take on these guys would have to be crazy to start with. He made a note to himself to keep an eye out for Bellatrix LeStrange. She qualified. Taking hold of the portkey supplied by Flickaxe, the group transported to Hogsmead.

Arriving at the edge of the village, the security men took a diamond pattern, wands out, to check out the area. Seeing nothing, they slid their wands into holsters, then spread out in a loose pattern, constantly looking, as alert as even Mad-eye Moody could hope for. The group had already packed their belongings and Harry's elves had taken the trunks to Hogwarts that morning. They had also had their purchases from that morning sent ahead to the school, where they would collect them with the morning mail. As they walked along toward the Three Broomsticks, Daphne Greengrass came up to Harry's side.

"Lord Black, I want to thank you for what you have done for us this past week. I was not expecting how gracious you would be."

Harry blushed. "Lady Greengrass, I was honored to be able to help. But since we are all either Lords or Ladies in this group, can we get past the formalities? My name is Harry. May I call you Daphne?"

"Of course. I am still a bit uncomfortable with this whole title bit. Originally my brother was supposed to take the title and the Head of House, but the idiot threw in with the Dark Lord and got himself

arrested and sentenced to life in Azkaban. He was legally barred from ever holding the title or seat. My father was quite upset, but my mother was not phased at all. She was terrified that my father's actions would ruin us. She was actually relieved when my father died. He had killed off her love many years before, it seems that people who join the Dark Lord end up losing their ability to love over a period of time."

"I've noticed that. By the way, I tend to call him the False Lord. He is not a noble, he's not even a pureblood. His name is Tom Riddle, he is the product of a love potion that an inbred, insane witch fed to a muggle. He is a fraud from the start and uses terror to make himself important. Right now, he is having trouble with funding since seven families who previously 'donated' to his cause suddenly left the fold. This, along with the expose about his background, is hurting his recruiting abilities."

"I read that in the Prophet, but I didn't know how much to believe. They are not the best source of information in Britain. Sometimes I think that the Quibbler puts out more truthful reporting than they do. And that is not saying much."

Harry laughed. "Actually, the Quibbler was right on target last year when they did the interview with me. I do have a plan in store for the Prophet though. I would like to talk to everyone here and see if they are interested in joining me."

"And what would that be?" By this time they had reached the pub and sat down at a large round table. It was Draco who had posed the question.

"The plan is to buy controlling interest in the Daily Prophet. I found out that the Black Estate holds 18 percent interest and the Potter Estate holds 10 percent. There is a possibility that some of you already own shares in the paper, but if we can get 51 percent interest, we can do what we want. We can make them print the truth for a start."

I also see some housecleaning in their future." Harry had a mental image of a giant foot giving Rita Skeeter the boot out of the paper's front door.

Draco laughed. "Let me guess, Rita Skeeter?"

"Got it in one. I really dislike that bi-er-witch." The rest of the table laughed.

"You had it right the first time," Pansy said. "That woman is as bad as Lockhart when it comes to self-promotion. If you are serious, put me in for 10 percent. But I get to be there when you fire Skeeter."

"I'll go for 10 also," Draco said. "We can use it to help keep a leash on the Ministry. Anyone else?"

The rest of the students offered to try to buy between 5 and 10 percent each after looking in their estates for existing shares. Harry told them that they could send a letter to Gringotts asking for an audit of their accounts. That would let them know their holdings and give them a better idea of what they could afford. They spent the next few hours until the train pulled in talking about the new dorm system, the classes they would take, and the tutoring that Harry would be getting. Several of them decided that they would share tutoring costs and time in different subjects that would not be covered in the basic curriculum. All too soon they heard the whistle of the Hogwarts Express as the train approached the station. They picked up their belongings and went to join the rest of the students. Harry thanked the security detail and sent them home.

A/N: I originally had a lot more to put in this chapter, but I already have almost 4,000 words. I will cover the sorting and feast in the next chapter.

CRaZY TeDDy, I would rather tame the Dragon than kill it. Don't worry, Draco is still going to be somewhat snarky, but he owes his

butt to Harry. And in his own twisted way, Draco is honorable in certain things, even if he IS a inbred prat.

Akugin Ashura: He will be getting special training, but he is not going to become some sort of avatar.

I would also like to thank everyone for the great reviews. It gives me a warm, fuzzy feeling..

Hamilton

Chapter 14

Back to School, Pt 2

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Welcoming Feast had never started as late as it had this year. Having to re-sort every student under the new dorm system had taken quite a while, and had ended up with some surprising results. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny all ended up in different dorms. All of the new Lords and Ladies were distributed more or less equally between the 4 dorms. The Sorting Hat seemed intent on breaking up old, but dangerous alliances. Draco was placed in Dorm 1, while Crabbe was in Dorm 3 and Goyle in 4. Harry was placed in Dorm 2, as was Daphne Greengrass. Ron was disgruntled to be placed in Dorm 1 with Draco. No longer would he be able to lean on Hermione to do the homework assignments as he had in the past. Reflecting his modest O.W.L. scores, Ron lost his prefect badge, but to his surprise and delight, was named captain of the Raven Quiddich team. Harry and Daphne were made prefects of their dorm, as were Draco, Hermione, and Ginny. Harry was offered the captaincy of the Serpent Quiddich team, but passed on the honor, not knowing if he would even have time for the sport this year.

Once the students were all seated at their respective Dorm tables, Minerva McGonagall sent a very weary Sorting Hat back to her office, then tapped a spoon against her goblet to get everyone's attention.

"Good evening, Hogwarts students. As you can see, we have begun a new era with new traditions at Hogwarts. No longer will we cling to the old and dangerous rivalries of the past, it is time that Hogwarts will come together as a unified student body. We must do this in order to survive in these perilous times. Inter-dorm cooperation should be the new paradigm under which you will learn your craft."

"We have made several changes as far as faculty is concerned.

While many of the professors are familiar to you, we have new faculty aboard. Our new Care of Magical Creatures teacher is Professor Grubby-Plank. The professor has agreed to come out of retirement for this year due to Professor Hagrid moving to France to join Beaubaxton's Academy. Our Potions instructor, following the retirement of Professor Snape will be Professor Horace Slughorn. Professor Slughorn will also be the faculty advisor to Dorm 4, located in the former Slytherin quarters. Our new Defense against the Dark Arts instructor is Professor Tashimoto, formerly an Auror and head of the DADA Association in Tokyo, Japan. I hope that you will give him a warm welcome to Hogwarts. Professor Tashimoto will also be the faculty advisor to Dorm 2, located in the former Hufflepuff quarters. We have not filled the Transformation post at this time, so I will continue teaching that subject to the 4th through 7th year students, with assistance from a temporary instructor, Professor Nymphadora Tonks teaching the 1st through 3rd year students. The faculty advisor for Dorm 1 will be Professor Sprout, located in the former Gryffindor quarters, and the faculty advisor for Dorm 3 will be Professor Sinestrass. Dorm 3 is located in the former Ravenclaw quarters."

"As always, the Forbidden Forest is just that, forbidden. The rules against magic in the hallways still applies, and our new caretaker, Mrs. Arabella Figg has inherited the list of forbidden items from our retired Mr. Filch. She will decide which, if any, items to keep on the list. You may contact her for details. Quiddich tryouts will be next Saturday, a sign up list will be in the Great Hall tomorrow. Teams will not be restricted to dorms, anyone can sign up for any team. Since tomorrow is Saturday, I suggest that you spend this weekend getting to know your new dorm mates, and for the post-O.W.L. students, choosing your courses. Now enjoy the feast!" With that, McGonagall clapped her hands, and, as had happened every year for a millennium, the food appeared in front of the students.

Following the feast, Harry and the other prefects led their dorm mates up to their new quarters and helped the younger ones get settled in. After completing that duty, he noticed that his belongings

had apparently not arrived. Harry figured that this was due to the house-elves having to wait until everyone was sorted in new dorms. He went down to the common room to wait. As he entered the common room, he met Daphne Greengrass, who also had no sleeping quarters prepared. Just then, Professor Tashimoto entered the common room and motioned the pair.

"Ah, Miss Greengrass, Mr. Potter, your presence is required in the Headmistresses office. The password is 'watchtower'."

"Thank you, Professor." Harry said. "Welcome to Hogwarts. I hope that you will enjoy your tenure here."

"I am sure that I will. I will also be starting a martial arts dueling club. With your... unique situation, I look forward to your attendance. But enough of that, you should hurry along to the Headmistress' office. We can discuss this later." With that, the two teens hurried out of the dorm.

Arriving at McGonagall's office, Harry and Daphne were surprised to see the other new Wizengamot members, also looking clueless. A door in the office opened and Minerva McGonagall stepped in.

"I am glad to see that all of you made it. I want to go over your duties and living arrangements with you. If you notice, all of you have been made prefects for your respective dorms, however you will not be living in those dorms. There is too much at stake to place you in the regular dorms. I have had the house elves open a suite of rooms with a common room. This was an area that has not been used in several centuries. It was originally intended to be for visiting VIP's, however the last time it was used was a situation much like this. There were 6 Heads of Houses who had received their titles prior to finishing school. Unfortunately, the reason they had inherited was through the assassination of their parents. We kept them safe then, and we will keep you safe now. You will have house elves to serve you, you can either use the school's or bring in elves that are bonded to you. You

will each have your own bedroom which you can password protect if you so choose. You will also be allowed to take your meals in your common room, if you so choose."

"As far as your prefect duties, I expect you to patrol nightly in your home dorm areas. You will also be setting the schedules for the 5th year prefects. There will be no 7th year prefects, the faculty will make up the difference since we have found that the 7th year students have, in the past, allowed either their prefect duties or their studies to suffer. You may have noticed also that we have assigned extra 5th and 6th year prefects. This will also help make up the gaps in coverage. I expect you to work with them. All of the 5th year prefects must have their patrols done prior to 11pm and be back in their dorms. Lord Potter-Black, I assume that you still have that map that your father and his friends made when they were here?"

At Harry's stunned look, McGonagall smiled a tight smile. "Yes, I know all about it. I would like to borrow it for a few days in order to duplicate it so that each of you will have a copy. Remus Lupin gave me the notes that he made during its creation. All of you need to be aware of your surroundings, and I think that this will be an invaluable aid. Although I still believe that Hogwarts is the safest place in the wizarding world, I cannot fool myself into thinking that there is no danger here. The last 5 years has shown me the folly of that belief."

"Professor, I will send the map back with a house elf as soon as we get to our quarters," Harry said. "Speaking of, where will we be located?"

"On the 6th floor. I will have an elf take you there now. Warbler!" A wizened elf appeared in the office and bowed low.

"How can Warbler serve Headmistress McGonagall?"

"Please take these students to the new quarters that were prepared earlier." The elf bowed again and motioned for the students to follow

him.

At Gringotts, Flickaxe smiled as he turned off the monitor that was covering McGonagall's office. Humming a tuneless ditty, he picked up the list of tutors that he had prepared for Harry. These were all reliable wizards, in other words, they would report to him in detail every thing that the Lords and Ladies did during their learning sessions. The part about the new rooms caught him by surprise, he would have to get someone in there to wire those rooms so that he could keep an eye on his charges. He made a note to himself to do that first thing in the morning.

Spinner's End

Same day

The Potions Master looked around at his dwelling and snorted. Severus Snape was not having a good day. He had been sacked from Hogwarts after Dumbledore's conviction and was in hiding from the Dark Lord. He had been able to put his house under the Fidelus charm, but it had cost him dearly. Being a teacher had not been a very financially rewarding position, but it had taken care of his needs. During his tenure at Hogwarts he had been able to sell some of his potions in the open market, but those days were past. He dared not show his face in public for fear of being spotted by people on either side hostile to the idea of his continued existence. Snape had considered his options, leaving the British Isles for other places in Europe or even America, but none of these appealed to him. If he went to Europe, he could be found easily by Voldemort's spies, and he detested Americans with their self righteous and superior attitudes. He also did not have the money to travel overseas.

Sitting down at a dusty table, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a vial. This was his last option. Should he be discovered by the Dark Lord, he would take the potion, committing suicide before allowing himself to be subjected to the tender mercies of his former master.

Putting the vial back in his pocket, he was startled to hear a pecking at the window. He turned to see a very familiar snowy owl.

"Potter?" he wondered. "What in the name of the Maker could he want? Does he want to rub in my shame?" Getting up and going to the window, he let Hedwig in. She flew over to the table and held out her leg for him to take the attached parchment. Snape took the parchment and opened it. He noted that the owl stayed put, waiting for a reply.

Professor Snape:

I know that we have had a rocky relationship, however I want you to know that I respect your abilities. The fact that you are in hiding from Voldemort shows me that you are on the same side in this war, or at least you are neutral. I have a proposition for you. I would like to hire you as a potions master I need someone who I can trust in the event that I would need healing or restorative potions. I have a full potions lab set up awaiting your reply. You would be on a salary as well as commission for any potions that we can sell, such as the Wolfsbane potion.

By the way, the reason that Hedwig was able to find you is that you hired Gringotts to install your Fidelus charm. They agreed to assist me in getting a message through to you. It is still secure in that only Gringotts knows your location and Hedwig was disillusioned for the delivery.

I await your return owl.

Lord Potter-Black

P.S. The salary will be quite a bit more substantial than your previous employer.

H.P.B.

Snape reread the letter, hardly daring to believe it. As much as he hated anything having to do with Potter, he had to admit that he may have misjudged the son and godson of the two men he hated most. He had also misjudged Dumbledore, thinking him to be the ultimate in light, but finding out too late that he was just another pawn to the conniving wizard, disposable as any other person. Picking up a quill, he penned his agreement and attached it to Hedwig's leg. He then gave the owl a bit of meat and sent her on her way.

Dumbledore Manor

The next day

The young Lord Dumbledore, along with his mother and Aberforth, were sitting in the parlour discussing the letter that they had just received from Jennifer. She had been sorted into the same dorm as Harry Potter. This pleased the trio to no end. Jennifer was a trusting soul, uninvolved with the schemes that were second nature in the pureblood community. Jonathon Dumbledore had not made up his mind about Harry Potter yet, he was not really convinced that Albus was as innocent as Aberforth and Violet believed, rather he was in awe of his great-great uncle's skill in manipulation. He did think that it was a shame that Albus had gotten so sloppy that he not only got caught, but put the welfare of the family in jeopardy. He vowed that if he ever got to that point, he would abdicate as head of the family in favor of a new generation.

"So, do you think that she will be able to get close enough to Potter to make a difference?" Aberforth asked.

"If she follows my advice, she should. Within the next two years, we should be able to marry her off to him and join the two families. Then after she produces an heir, Potter will be disposable. I plan to send her some mild potions that she can take and slip to him to make both of them more... how should I say it... attractive to each other."

"What about the Black estate?," asked Violet.

"I don't believe that we will be able to do much about that. Potter will probably take a second wife in order to produce an heir for that family. If he doesn't, then it is a possibility that it could go to a child of Jennifer's by default, but realistically would probably end up either with one of the Malfoys or Tonks. I don't believe that we should count on that. Dear little sister Jennifer just needs to concentrate on reeling in Potter and making lots of babies. We just need to make sure that You-know-who doesn't kill off Potter before that happens. And that means getting as close to him as possible and giving him what he needs to win. A wise man once said, 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer', and that is what I plan to do. I just don't plan to let Potter know that he is an enemy. Right now he has the upper hand and real power in the Wizengamot, whether he knows it or not. It may take a generation or even two to restore us to the top of the heap, but get there we will. I have patience."

Warcry watched the monitor, fascinated. Flickaxe would want to know about this threat to the Potter account. He placed the memory in a vial, marked it 'urgent', and placed it on Flickaxe's desk. After switching the monitors to check out various locations related to the Potter-Black accounts, he shut down the system and left for the night. It was because of this that he did not see the vial with the Dumbledore memory roll off the desk and fall among discarded pieces of parchment in the trash bin. An hour later, a low ranking goblin came into the office, straightened up, and dumped the trash.

Chapter 15

Dumbledore's Dilemma

Azkaban Prison

Auror James Fogarty pulled his cloak tighter and shivered. He hated this place. He started hating it the day that he had been transferred here when the Dementors had abandoned their posts, and his hatred had only gotten more intense as time went by. He knew that he had screwed up somewhere, the Ministry only sent you out here if they wanted you out of the public eye. Azkaban had as many misfits patrolling the corridors as it had behind the bars.

As he sat at a desk filling out paperwork in the high security/unredeemable wing, he gave little thought to the prisoners he was tasked on guarding. He only had 5 prisoners in the whole wing. Four of them were mass murderers who, if the Dementors had still been there, would have lost their souls to the foul creatures. The other prisoner was a former hero of the wizarding world, Albus Dumbledore. Fogarty thought that a great injustice had been done in the case of the former Hogwarts headmaster. He remembered Dumbledore as a kindly grandfather, the man who had convinced him to strive to be his best, the mentor who had encouraged him to become an auror. Fogarty spent many hours talking with his former headmaster, trying to encourage him. It was only fair after all the man had done for him.

Fogarty was startled out of his musings by the door to the cellblock opening and two people entering. One was a woman in her 50s, the other was the warden of Azkaban. Fogarty jumped to attention.

"Sir, what can I do for you?"

"We need to see Albus Dumbledore. He is to be released. The Wizengamot has heard his appeal and granted him a new trial. He is

to be released to the custody of his niece on bond until the new trial."

"That is great news, sir. I always thought that he got a raw deal. Follow me, I'll take you to him." As the trio walked down the cell, Fogarty thought that the justice system worked, even if it was sometimes slow. He was sure that Dumbledore would be exonerated, although it was a shame that his magical core had been burnt. Coming up to the cell, he unlocked it, allowing the woman to enter.

"Uncle Albus? It's Violet. I'm here to take you home. You have been granted a new trial." The aged prisoner looked at her in disbelief, then a small smile came on his face.

"Do you have something besides prison garb for me to wear? I want to shed all memories of this awful place."

"I brought a robe for you. It is not as nice as what you have had, but it is better than what you have now. It is in the warden's office. You can change there." As they left the cell, Dumbledore spotted Fogarty and grasped his arm.

"Thank you for being the one bright spot in this miserable place. Were it not for your encouragement, I might have already gone insane or died. You will somehow be rewarded." The group walked over to the cellblock exit, then the warden and the Dumbledores passed through, leaving Fogarty with the first happy thought he had since coming to the prison.

Thirty minutes later, Fogarty made one quick round to check on his prisoners before going on a quick break. He locked the cellblock behind himself, then hurried down the corridor to the lunch room. As he entered the lunchroom, he received an awful shock. Scattered around the room were the bodies of the other guards. Every one was dead. Gagging, he ran out of the room toward the warden's office to report. Not bothering to knock, he burst through the door to find the warden sitting behind the desk with his throat slit from ear to ear. At

that moment, other than prisoners, James Fogarty was the only person left alive on Azkaban.

Out at sea, Albus Dumbledore shivered as he thought of his sudden change of fortune. He would not rest until everything he lost had been restored to him. He had no doubt that this would happen. He was somewhat surprised that the warden of Azkaban was personally delivering him back to the mainland, but he thought that it might be due to the fact that the Wizengamot felt they were so wrong that he deserved the VIP treatment. He tapped his niece, Violet's shoulder to say something to her, but as she turned toward him, her features began to blur. They reformed into a face that had given him nightmares, Bellatrix Lestrange. She smiled at him. Whipping his head around to see the warden, he was shocked to see the warden also blurring into someone else. Lord Voldemort.

"Hello Headmaster. Isn't polyjuice wonderful stuff?"

Albus Dumbledore Escapes Azkaban!

Warden and Guards Murdered!

Dumbledore Niece Wanted for Questioning!

Exclusive to the Daily Prophet

Staff Writer Horatio Winding

Earlier today, the notorious "Evil Lord of Light", Albus Dumbledore, with the apparent assistance of his great niece, Violet Dumbledore, escaped the high security of Azkaban prison, murdering all but one of the Ministry Aurors and the warden in the process. The only Auror left alive was one James Fogarty, a five year veteran of the Aurors who was actually guarding the cellblock. Auror Fogarty, originally suspected of assisting in the escape, was questioned under Veritaserum as to the events at the prison.

Apparently, Ms. Violet Dumbledore, great-niece of the notorious Albus Dumbledore, convinced the warden that her uncle had been granted a new trial, something that the Wizengamot strongly denies. After freeing Dumbledore from his cell, one or both of them massacred all of the ministry personnel on the island other than Fogarty before making their escape.

The Ministry has placed a 50,000 galleon reward for the capture, dead or alive, of Albus Dumbledore, and is offering a 10,000 galleon reward for the live capture of Violet Dumbledore. Readers are warned to call the aurors if these fugitives are spotted, they are considered armed and desperate.

At that moment, the two most wanted fugitives in Britain were tied up, back to back, in a cellar of a derelict house in Wales. This place, formerly owned by the muggle family of a Hogwarts student witch, was Voldemort's new base of operations. The muggles, along with their magical child, were murdered in one of Voldemort's rampages against 'mudbloods' the previous year. Voldemort thought it fitting that he was using the spoils of war from which to operate. The house was in a rural area, secluded from other dwellings in the area. No local people would go near it since the murders, and prospective buyers were scared away by its reputation. The real estate agents would not even show it anymore.

Violet Dumbledore was an innocent bystander caught up in the Dark Lord's plot. She had been shopping in Diagon Alley when Bellatrix Lestrange had captured her. Violet was using the dressing room at Madam Maulkin's when Bella, wearing a glamour, had followed her, stunned her and portkeyed out of the shop. Since that time, she had been held in this cellar while Bella used polyjuice to create sightings of her around Britain. Voldemort had actually done Albus Dumbledore a favor, albeit for selfish reasons. When Albus was sentenced to the multiple life sentences, the DMLE had put a soul

tracker on him so that future incarnations would have to serve the multiple life sentences. Voldemort had removed the soul tracker so that the ministry could not track Dumbledore down to Voldemort's hideout. Should Dumbledore die, his soul at least would be free.

One of Voldemort's Death Eaters, a former Auror named Dawlish, was using polyjuice to impersonate Dumbledore. Whenever Voldemort made an appearance, "Dumbledore" was with him, either side-apparating or using a portkey. Since the real Dumbledore had his magical core burnt out, Dawlish would cause mayhem with a muggle Uzi submachine gun. These were random raids, with random targets, killing 2 or 3 people at a time, then disappearing. Most of the victims were muggles, but some were the families of magical people, mostly students at Hogwarts. The muggle authorities were chalking the killings up to either random crimes or terrorist attacks by religious extremists. The Ministry of Magic was trying its best to keep the lid on, censoring the papers. This was marginally successful until the armoured car robbery.

Voldemort was desperate for cash since his support from the pureblood families like the Malfoys had dried up. Many of the random killings had been made to look like robberies, the victims wallets and other belongings taken. Voldemort was no longer paying in wizarding gold, he had been forced to resort to muggle pounds which his followers could convert, for a price, at Gringotts. One of the random attacks had been on a busy London street where an armoured car had been making a delivery to a large department store. The fake Dumbledore had appeared with Voldemort and started spraying people with bullets, hitting and killing the armoured car attendant as he was taking the bags of money into the store on a dolly. It was almost an afterthought that the Death Eaters grabbed the bags, thinking that there might be something in there they could use. Voldemort was overjoyed to slice open the bags and find them stuffed with muggle money. His followers were paid for the first time in many weeks, and Voldemort began to plan other robberies to get more cash.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Office of the Headmistress

"I don't care how many sightings that they have had, the Violet Dumbledore who I met would never act like that! I also don't believe that Albus would join ranks with Voldemort, its just too far out of character."

Harry Potter-Black, the very person responsible for putting Albus Dumbledore in Azkaban, was in the unusual situation of defending the former headmaster to people who had known Dumbledore much longer than he had. Minerva McGonagall, Mad-eye Moody, and Remus Lupin had taken the Daily Prophet at face value, something that they all should have been old enough and wise enough not to do. "Albus is a scheming, double-dealing scoundrel who got greedy and got caught, but he would never cross over that far. He believes that the end justifies the means, but the ends he worked for were on the side of light."

"Harry, don't you think that his time in Azkaban could have pushed him over the other way" asked Remus.

"Absolutely not. He would have believed he was still right, and would do everything possible to convince the world. There is no way that he would join Riddle. Tom has been greatly weakened by the purebloods deserting him and pulling their money. He has had to resort to common crime, murder and robbery. And that whole bit with the machine gun? I doubt that a 150 year old wizard would know which end of the thing that the bullet comes out. Moody, if anyone here would know, it should be you. People are not necessarily who they seem to be."

Harry embarrassed Mad-eye, reminding him that he spent almost a whole school year locked in his trunk while Barty Crouch, Jr.

impersonated him using polyjuice. Mad-eye's motto of CONSTANT VIGILANCE had failed him the day that Crouch had kidnapped him. He could see Moody and the others nod in agreement at that.

"Minerva, could you send for Jennifer Dumbledore? I believe that she could shed a lot of light on this."

"Certainly. I will send a house elf for her. I also want to check something else." McGonagall summoned an elf, gave him some instructions the others could not hear, then turned back to the others. "I have also sent for Violet Dumbledore's transcripts and test results. We should be able to settle some of this quickly."

A moment later the elf popped back into the office. "Jasmine had given Miss Dumbledore the message that Headmistress wants to see her. She is on her way. Here is other thing Headmistress wants." McGonagall took the parchment from the little elf. Scanning it, she began to frown, then dismissed Jasmine. She was just about to say something when there was a knock at the door. Minerva waved it open and admitted Jennifer Dumbledore. It was obvious that the girl had been crying, but she also had a stubborn, determined look on her face. Harry recognized the look, he had seen it much of his life when he had looked in a mirror. His heart went out to her.

"Miss Dumbledore, thank you for coming," Minerva said. "I would like to ask you, if it as alright, a few questions about your mother." She was not prepared for the girl's reaction.

"She didn't do anything!" Jennifer fixed a glare upon the group, but mostly at Harry. "Are you trying to destroy what little family I have left?" Books and other objects began rattling on shelves as waves of accidental magic started radiating off the teen.

"Calm down!" Minerva began to say, but just then there was a flash of fire and Fawkes, missing since Albus' trial, appeared and, perching on Jennifer's shoulder, began to trill a soothing song. The magic

began to ebb and Jennifer burst out in tears.

"I know it looks bad, but Mother could not have done the things they are saying! Even if she went completely insane and crossed to the Dark, she would not have the magical power to do these things. Mother was a very weak witch, almost a squib! She had trouble with basic household spells, that is why we always had a house elf, even though we really could not afford it." As the girl began to quiet down, Fawkes rubbed his head against her cheek, then hopped off her shoulder and over to Harry to allow him to pet him.

"I believe you, Miss Dumbledore," Minerva said. "I have your mother's transcripts and test results here. Although she went to school at a very exclusive school in Switzerland, Albus kept a copy of her transcripts. She was excellent in non-magical subjects such as potions and History of Magic, but had it not been for Albus' intervention, she would have failed the school due to her poor showing in magic using classes.

"Fawkes," Harry asked, "Do you know where Albus and Violet are?" Fawkes nodded and trilled. "Can you get to them to bring them here?" Fawkes made a sad sound and shook his head. "Is the place warded against Light Creatures?" Another nod. "Can you take me there?" Fawkes danced on the desk while nodding.

"Harry! You cannot go in there alone!" Remus exclaimed.

"I had not planned on it. If Fawkes can take one of us to the area so that person could create a portkey, then we gather forces together and the next time that Voldemort stages a raid, we go in force on a rescue mission."

Mad-eye stood up. "It will have to be me. No one else here can make an untraceable portkey. If Albus and Jennifer's mother are being used for polyjuiced Death Eaters, then it is even more personal. Besides, if anyone is there when the portkey is being made, I have

the best chance of coming out alive." Mad-eye picked up a decorative tambourine off McGonagall's office wall. "A nice round object. Makes for a good multi person portkey, Fawkes?" Fawkes flew over and Moody grabbed his tail. They both disappeared in a flash of fire. Less than a minute later, they reappeared in the office with Moody holding the portkey and grinning. "All set, they never saw a thing." He hanged the portkey back up for use at a later time."

"Jennifer," Harry said. "I need you to keep quiet about all of this. When we are able to rescue your relatives, the truth will come out. Until then, you just need to hold it in and keep your regular routine. I believe that the Headmistress should contact your brother and Aberforth. They should have the option of going on any rescue mission and clearing your mother's name." Minerva nodded agreement. "May I escort you back to your dorm?"

Jennifer tilted her head back and looked at Harry in a new light. "Thank you, Lord Potter. That would be very nice of you."

After the two teens left the office, Remus said, "She seems like a very nice girl, but the way she looked at Harry just now, well, I've seen that look before." At Minerva's quizzical expression, Remus continued. "The last time I saw that look was when Lily Evans decided that James potter was not quite as bad as she had thought. That was the same day that the courtship started. Of course, at that time James was totally willing, where Harry doesn't seem to have a clue." There were smiles and snickers all around.

Flickaxe turned off the monitor showing McGonagall's office with a sigh of relief. The Ministry had been making noises about seizing Dumbledore's assets, or at least freezing them so that none of the money could end up in Voldemort's hands. Clearing Violet Dumbledore's name, and in a lesser part, Albus', at least of these latest murders, would go a long way toward shutting them up. Since his assistant, Warcry, was out doing errands, he sent a memo to him to glue himself to monitor screens watching key players, and the

moment that a rescue raid began, to assist the raiders in any way possible that would not be obvious. Goblins were very good at that.

Chapter 16

Rescue Raid in Wales

Ministry of Magic

Office of the Minister

"Absolutely not!" screamed Cornelius Fudge . "What are you people thinking, wanting to risk Ministry personnel, as well as untrained civilians in some sort of harebrained scheme to 'rescue' a couple of criminals like the Dumbledores?"

Minerva McGonagall and Mad-eye Moody had come to the Minister to ask for Aurors to go along on the raid on Voldemort's lair. The request had not gone over well. In the opinion of the Minister, the plan had too many down sides, the largest one being that he had jumped on the bandwagon condemning Violet and Albus Dumbledore in connection with the murders and robberies connected with Voldemort. In his eyes, he couldn't be seen to be backing down in relation to their guilt. If Fudge had his way, Violet would disappear into Azkaban without a trial, just as Sirius Black had those many years past. The only thing that was stopping him from doing that in the event of her capture was the political pressure from the other pureblood families.

"Cornelius," Mad-eye said. "Look at the bright side. If the Dumbledores are guilty, you will get the credit for capturing them and putting them where they belong. If they have, as we believe, been impersonated, then you will be a hero for exposing You-Know-Who's plot. It's a win-win situation either way for you."

"Unless You-Know-Who wipes out your little band of fools along with valuable Aurors. Which is the more likely scenario. If you think that I am going to allow valuable Ministry Aurors to go on some sort of fools errand to rescue criminals who don't want or need rescuing,

then you are as daft as that idiot Lovegood who runs the Quibbler. Now if you will see yourselves out, I have real Ministry business to conduct." With that, he pointed imperiously at the door. McGonagall sighed and, with Moody leading the way, left the Ministers office.

"Well," said Moody, "It looks like we will have to do this the hard way. I will check with old Order members who might be willing to help, and you need to go ask Potter to speak with Lord Dumbledore to see what he would like to do."

"I concur. It would be better for Harry to speak with Dumbledore, a meeting between equals. Please floo to my office tonight with whatever plan you can put together and we will proceed from there." With that, the two old warriors split up, Minerva heading toward the floo connection and Moody thumping toward the public apparition point.

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Dumbledore Manor

Later that day

The fireplace turned green and Harry Potter's head showed in the flames. "Jonathon, may I come through?"

Jonathon Dumbledore swallowed down the anger and distaste he felt for his fellow noble and put a bland smile on his face. "Certainly, Harry. Come through."

Harry Potter-Black stepped elegantly out of the fireplace and shook hands with Jonathon. "There is very little time, so I had better get right to it. Jonathon, I want you to know that I am completely convinced of your mother's and Albus' innocence in these attacks and I plan to do something about it."

Jonathon was stunned. This was the last thing he had expected to hear. He was sure that Potter-Black would gleefully throw Uncle Albus to the dogs and if Violet happened to get caught up in that, would not lift a finger to help. He was having a hard time getting a feel for this man. On one hand, he had helped subject Uncle Albus to the harshest punishment, even worse than death, ever handed down in the Wizengamot, on the other, he was offering to help clear Jonathon's mother and great uncle of these crimes that had been attributed to them. Now to find out if it was just empty lip service.

"That is all well and good, Harry, but what do you propose to actually help the situation? There has been no clue of their whereabouts since the Azkaban massacre."

"We have located the place where they are being held. We are putting together a rescue mission to bring them out. I am here to ask if you would like to be a part of it. The raid will require split second timing and a willingness to go at a moment's notice."

"Of course I want to be a part of it. How will I be notified?"

"The first thing will be to come to Hogwarts tonight at about 6:45 this evening. We will be putting together our operational plan at that time. As far as notifying you of when we will actually leave on the raid...."

Harry pulled out his wand and pointed it into the middle of the room. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!" His stag patronus erupted from the wand, looked around, then gracefully walked up to him and gazed expectantly at him, then vanished.

"When we are ready to go, I will send my patronus to you. You will need to apparate to the entrance of Hogwarts and we will leave from there."

"I am impressed. I have never been able to produce a corporeal patronus. Yours is beautiful. So, I will be at the Headmistress' office

tonight. Should I bring anything?"

"Bring a picture of your mother. I want to make sure that everyone knows who we are looking for." The two walked toward the fireplace, shook hands, then Harry tossed in a handful of floo powder and was gone.

Jonathon walked to the study and sat down heavily in his chair. He did not know quite what to think. He had blamed Potter for everything that had befallen his family, but the reality was difficult to accept. Every meeting with Potter-Black had shown him to be completely open, far more open than Jonathon had been. He had read Uncle Albus' journals, but unlike his mother and grandfather, he believed that they were genuine. Uncle Albus had been firmly on the side of light, he believed this with all his heart, but still had, in the past few decades, had shown a reckless disregard for the people he had worked with, believing that the ends justified the means. It was much the same way that Jonathon himself approached life.

Jonathon had, in fact, put together a plan using his sister and Harry Potter to continue the Dumbledore line while gaining control of the Potter-Black lines. By encouraging a possible relationship between the two, he could ensure the pureblood continuance of his family. He had two valid reasons for this scheme. The first was that Jonathon Dumbledore was gay in a society where homosexuality was considered a mental disorder. Jonathon would have been willing to enter a marriage of convenience to produce an heir, no matter how much distaste he would have felt carrying out his 'marital duties', but due to spell damage that he had incurred during school, damage that only his mother was aware of, Jonathon Dumbledore was completely sterile. This meant that he was under no real pressure to enter a heterosexual marriage, however he still needed to somehow continue the Dumbledore line. This is where Jennifer came in.

Should she produce a male heir, the family would continue through this cadet branch. Since Potter was the most influential 'Light' ,or at

least 'Light Grey' male available, he should be the chosen donor of genetic material for Jennifer's offspring. That Potter was the number one target of Voldemort and had, in Jonathon's opinion, a life expectancy to be measured in weeks rather than years, was all that much to the better. Should Harry produce an heir through Jennifer, then get killed, Jonathon would control the Potter and possibly even the Black inheritances as a magical guardian until the child reached the age of majority.

The meeting with Potter had made an impression on Jonathon in that he was starting to rethink his plan on revenge. He would have to do some more thinking, possibly even try to convince his mother that the diaries were for real. For now, however, Jonathon needed to bring himself to a state of readiness for the upcoming mission.

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Office of the Headmistress

The people gathered together for the rescue mission was certainly a diverse group. They had decided on a fast strike group, sacrificing manpower for speed and effectiveness. The decision was made that this was not to be a full out frontal assault, but rather a quick insert and retreat, hopefully with no casualties on either side. The rescuers really hoping that they would be able to do the extraction without even meeting any of Riddle's Death Eaters, but if they did, it would be as bloodless as possible, using only stunners if they could. Since they had no real intel on the layout of the house, they were assuming that the prisoners would be held in the basement, since that would be the easiest place to fortify against intrusion. The assault team consisted of Harry, Fred and George Weasley, Jonathon Dumbledore, Mad-Eye Moody, and Draco Malfoy.

Draco's role was to scout out the house and find the Dumbledores,

then report back as to the easiest route to make the assault. In this, Draco had an advantage that none of the others could match. Since his fourth year, when Barty Crouch Jr. impersonating Mad-Eye Moody had turned him into a white ferret, Draco had actually been very impressed with the feeling of being in an animal form and had spent the past two years working to become an animagus. It had only been a short three weeks past that he had finally made the breakthrough and had been able to transform into his animal form, that of a nondescript grey squirrel. Harry and the Weasley twins had began training to become animagi, but none of the three had yet to find their animal forms.

When they had started the meeting, Harry had passed each one a Galleon charmed by Hermione to act as sort of a magical pager to notify each person that the time for the rescue had come. The members that were away from Hogwarts would then apparate to the gates, meeting up with the others. The group would then portkey from Hogwarts to Riddle's hideout.

What none of them realized at the time was that their planning session was not as secret as they might have liked. At Gringotts, the goblin Warcry was watching and taking notes. When the meeting broke up and the wizards left McGonagall's office, Warcry put in an urgent call to Flickaxe in order to update him on the planning session. After hearing the plans, Flickaxe sat back and thought a moment.

"Put together three or four warriors to make sure that their mission is successful and that no harm comes to either Potter-Black, Malfoy, or the young Lord Dumbledore. It would be best if all of the rescuers and hostages are unhurt, but if need be the others are expendable. No harm must come to the heirs. It goes without saying that Voldemort's people are disposable. The more taken out now, the fewer that can cause problems later." Flickaxe shook his head. He was disappointed in the wizards for not realizing that fact and including it in their plans. It was a good thing that they had a common sense goblin watching out for them. Of course, if they had any

common sense at all, they would have just hired a goblin hit team and sat back while the job was done correctly.

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Voldemort's Hideout

"Is everyone ready to go?" Voldemort, although appearing cocky, was not as confident as he seemed. This raid would, if successful, take care of his money problems for the foreseeable future. He had been so impressed with the amount of money collected from the department store raid where his people had taken the armoured car bags that he decided to strike at the source. He had his people following different armoured cars on their routes, discovering the location of the terminal for the trucks and scouting out what defenses the company had. He had also figured out that the best time to hit them would be roughly 2:00 am when the last truck had checked back in and the vault would be full. This would be much easier than hitting Gringotts, after all, it was just muggles. What kind of real defense could they muster?

Seeing the nods from his Death Eaters, Voldemort pulled out a piece of rope that he had made into a portkey that would drop them in the loading dock area of the armoured car company. He wanted to make sure that this went smoothly, so he took almost all of his Death Eaters with him, leaving only a skeleton crew of four junior Death Eaters to guard the prisoners. Considering the shape that the Dumbledores were in, he didn't even need that many, but better safe than sorry. The raiding party grabbed onto the rope and, with a word from Voldemort, disappeared.

Roughly 5 minutes after Voldemort and his crew left, 6 people appeared in a small copse of woods about 100 meters from the house. One of those people disappeared from sight, then a small grey blur streaked across the ground and up a trellis to disappear into a broken attic window. After a nerve wracking 10 minutes, the

squirrel ran back to the group and turned back into Draco Malfoy.

"Ok, the wards are nothing special, in fact a pretty sloppy job. I can't believe that the Dark Lord put them in place himself, they have a big hole about 10 feet from the northwest corner of the house. Once we get inside that ward, we can just sidle next to the house to the back door. There are three Death Eaters up on the second floor playing cards and one in the basement on guard duty. If we go in quietly, we should be able to stun the guard, slip right back out and portkey out when we get past the wards." Seeing nods of agreement from the others, Draco led them, single file toward the hole in the wards.

Once inside, the group silently made their way to the basement. Mad-Eye had stayed outside the door to avoid his wooden leg from making noise on the floor and to guard the exit route. Once they got to the basement, Jonathon shoved open the door and sent a quick stunner at the lone guard, taking him down before he could raise the alarm. They then slipped in and untied Albus and Violet.

The two hostages were in bad shape, having been the recipients of Bellatrix Lestranger's tender mercies. Whenever she would get a bit bored, she would drop into the basement for some creative torture. As long as the hostages were alive, the polyjuice potion would work. There was nothing that said that the donor had to be uninjured or even sane. The torture had the added effect of keeping them weak enough that they could not make a serious escape attempt. It was shortly after freeing Albus from his bindings that everything went straight to hell.

During Draco's recon of the house, there was one being that he had missed. A house elf had been coming down to the basement to bring the guard a sandwich and had spotted the raiding party just before they entered the basement. The frightened elf had slipped back into a hallway and popped up to the second floor and notified the remaining Death Eaters of the raid. The Death Eaters had then silently slipped down the stairs and come in behind the rescuers. The

rescue party had made a fatal mistake by getting overconfident and not leaving a watcher behind to guard against this very event. The first clue that they were in trouble was when they heard the beginning of the killing curse being thrown at the group. As the green light streaked toward Draco, Albus moved faster than anyone would have thought possible. Shoving Draco out of the way, Albus Dumbledore redeemed himself by intercepting the killing curse with his own body. Harry and the twins immediately hit the Death Eater with simultaneous stunners, taking him out of the action. Curses and stunners filled the room and, in a few seconds, it was all over, with all of the Death Eaters out for the count. Hearing the commotion, Mad-Eye came thundering in the door and caught the rearmost Death Eater in a full body bind. Thumping his way into the room, Mad-Eye snorted in disgust.

"What a bloody muck-up! How many times have I told you, 'Constant Vigilance?' You could have all been killed!" As the group looked down, shamefaced, he continued. "So, geniuses, what is your next move?"

Fred spoke up. "George and I will take Albus back with us. We don't leave him behind for Snakeface to gloat over. Whatever wrong Albus has done in the past, he saved our lives here at the cost of his own life. He deserves whatever dignity we can give him." Seeing Jonathon and Violet's grateful looks, Harry broke in.

"Jonathon, you help your mother," and pointing at Dumbledore's killer, "Draco and I will take this bastard back with us to face charges for the killing curse. Mad-Eye, you guard our retreat in case Riddle has any more surprises waiting. We all go back to Hogwarts to sort this out. With this Death Eater in custody, our testimony that Violet and Albus were captives, and Violet taking Veritaserum, we can get her cleared. Let's go."

With that, the group slipped out of the house and left.

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Bigalow's Armoured Car Service

London

The robbery started bad and quickly got worse. Voldemort and his Death Eaters, however, had no clue that anything was wrong. It started as soon as they portkeyed into the loading dock. Bellatrix was polyjuiced into Violet Dumbledore and Dawlish was imitating Albus, both carrying muggle weapons as well as wands. Dawlish, of course, needed the muggle weapon to carry out his impersonation of a squibbed Albus, but the others were carrying them to make an impression on the muggle guards. They figured that they would not be taken seriously if they came in waving what the guards would assume to be short sticks. They needed the employees to assist them in removing the most amount of money in the shortest period of time. Afterward they would dispose of most of the guards, leaving some alive as witnesses who would identify the 'Dumbledores'. Their mistake was underestimating the muggles.

When the raiders portkeyed in, they never noticed the surveillance cameras mounted on the wall. Up on the third floor, a guard just happened to glance up from his crossword puzzle and spotted the group on the monitor. Since the group, other than Voldemort and the 'Dumbledores' were wearing black robes and masks, it was pretty obvious that they were not employees. The guard hit a panic button, locking the counting room doors and shutting the vault to minimize the amount of money left in the open. The vault then set the time lock. This also put the remaining guards on alert, giving them time to pull their weapons. Voldemort knew nothing of this.

Strolling up to the counting room door, the front Death Eater unlocked it with a simple unlocking charm. They charged into the room right into a hail of bullets. Since the Death Eaters were not just a little overconfident, (after all, they were going against mere muggles!) they had not even bothered to put up simple shields.

Although most shields would stop a bullet or two before collapsing, they did not even have this dubious bit of protection. Within 10 seconds, there were seven Death Eaters laying dead on the floor, half of Voldemort's raiding party. A few more precious seconds were wasted as the wizards attempted to fire their muggle weapons. Some of them had their safeties on, some had not had a bullet jacked into the chamber of their semi-automatic weapons, and still others did not even have loaded weapons. They had acquired the weapons, but other than Dawlish, none of the pureblood wizards had any training in handling muggle weapons.

Quickly dropping their guns, the wizards fell back to what they knew best, magic. Within seconds, the green lights of the killing curse filled the counting room, taking down all but one of the defending guards. With a look of disgust, Voldemort stunned the last guard and strolled into the room. There was actually less money in the counting room than on a typical armoured car stop. Waking up the guard, Voldemort pointed his wand at the man and said, 'CRUCIO!' After the guard had writhed in agony for a few seconds, Voldemort released the curse.

"Now that you know that I can cause you more pain than you have ever felt, tell me where the rest of the money is before I make you wish that I had simply killed you along with your comrades."

The guard gasped out, "Its in the vault!" He pointed at the huge steel door.

"Violet, please unlock the door so that we may reap the spoils." Voldemort hissed. Bellatrix lazily waved her wand at the vault door and shot an unlocking spell at it. The dials of the combination whirled, going back and forth, then stopped. The door did not unlock. The Death Eaters were floored. Bellatrix spun around and pointed her wand at the guard.

"Worm! Why does it not open?" She placed a short crucio on the guard just to make sure he knew that she meant business.

"It's on a time lock! It doesn't matter how many times you put the combination in, it will not unlock until the time is up!"

"And when will that be?"

The guard cringed, knowing that these people with their strange weapons and tortures were not going to be pleased. "When it goes into an emergency lockdown like this, it will not reopen for 12 hours."

Pointing his wand at the door, Voldemort angrily loosed a blasting curse at the vault door. It hit the 2 foot thick polished steel door and bounced off, hitting one of the Death Eaters and taking his head off. The others ducked to avoid the flying blood and brains. Just then the wail of police sirens could be heard entering the armoured car company yard. Voldemort had no intention of facing down a force of muggle police with the few Death Eaters he had left. He quickly gave his orders.

"Take these bags and grab everything left out. Once the bags are loaded, shrink them down and we'll go." He made a quick wand motion and stunned the remaining guard. "He should make a good witness."

As the Death Eaters were loading their bags, Dawlish lost his disguise, reflecting Albus Dumbledore's death back at the hideout. Voldemort did not notice until they were portkeying away. When they disappeared from the room, appearing back at the hideout, something happened that added insult to the injury that they had suffered. The Death Eaters had loaded everything that looked like money into the bags. Along with the Queen's good British pounds were several anti-theft dye packs. There were at least three per bag. The dye packs exploded, covering both the money and the robbers in a violently purple coloured dye. The Weasley twins would have been greatly impressed with the results. That particular dye, developed by a squib as a joke, was impervious to any kind of cleaning charm or

detergent. The money was ruined and the robbers would have to let the coloration wear off.

Arriving back at the hideout, Voldemort had an even bigger shock. His hostages were missing along with one of his guards. The other three guards were dismembered and their body parts strewn throughout the house. The goblins had waited until the rescue party had left, then made sure that the remaining Death Eater guards would never again be a factor in the war. This was a message to Voldemort that he was up against someone not to be trifled with. It was also a warning that he needed a new hideout.

A/N: It is a pretty long chapter with much more action than normal. In the near future, the goblins will get their comeuppance.

Chapter 17

Baking Fudge

Potter Manor

10 hours after the raid

"Do you realize what a cock-up you have handed me" Madam Bones was not pleased. She had received an urgent 'invitation' to come to Potter Manor this afternoon. Normally this would not have been something to be displeased about, schmoozing with a friendly but powerful Wizengamot member could make for a very pleasant afternoon. What took this invitation from the ordinary to the extraordinary was the request to bring along two aurors and a vial of Veritaserum. Her suspicions raised, she had planned to take along extra aurors, perhaps having them apparate to the exterior of the mansion as a back up. The problem with this plan was Harry's home was under the Fidelus Charm and the portkey that he provided was good for three people. Period.

She and her aurors had portkeyed in on schedule to arrive in an entryway, then to be led by an enthusiastic house elf to a large drawing room. She briefly wondered what it was about Potter that affected house elves in such a way. The most staid house elf could be exposed to Harry for a few hours only to become as hyper as a sports cheerleader. At least she knew now that she was not landing in the middle of a group of Death Eaters. The drawing room was also a surprise, at least insofar as the inhabitants. Striding to meet her, hand outstretched, was, of course, Harry Potter-Black. Then came the people who were, at least behind their back at the Wizengamot, gaining the nickname of "Potter's Posse", those newly seated Wizengamot members that shared the center aisle with him. Next, seated in a stiff, high backed chair, was probably the only person who would be comfortable in such a piece of furniture, Minerva McGonagall.

What she did not realize was that the people in the room were only a few of the ones watching this scene. Besides the unknown to anyone inclusion of the Gringotts goblins, via their bugging devices, were Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, Mad-Eye Moody, Aberforth Dumbledore, and our favorite muckraker, Rita Skeeter. In an upstairs room were Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom, both of whom were standing watch over Violet Dumbledore while Madam Pomfrey fussed over her, trying to undo some of the damage done to her the past few weeks. Everyone except Rita Skeeter had their wands at hand, ready to take down any threat to either Violet or Harry. The hardest person to convince was Aberforth Dumbledore. He, along with Violet, did not believe that Albus' journals were authentic. It had taken a wizard's oath to finally convince the two of them that Harry was not lying about the things written in the journal and that he had no animus toward the Dumbledore family. Had it been up to him, the punishment handed down to Albus that day would have been much different. Harry had only wanted to be left alone. He thought that he had shown that by restoring the Dumbledore vault and family ring, but suspicions die hard.

Back to the drawing room, in the center of the room was a pensieve. After greeting Amelia Bones, Harry got right to the point. "Madam Bones, what we are here to do is give you testimony that you can take in front of the Wizengamot to correct an injustice." Seeing her puzzled look, Harry continued. "Everyone associated with this will take a wizarding oath that all of their pensieve memories are accurate. The Veritaserum is for someone else. I, Harry James Potter-Black, swear upon my magic that all of the pensieve testimony that I shall give is true to the best of my knowledge."

Seeing Amelia's acceptance of the oath, Harry continued. "I would like to start by telling you that we had figured out Voldemort's location and that we had our belief that the Dumbledores were innocent of the crimes of which they had been charged." Taking in Amelia's gob-smacked expression, Harry shook his head. "Madam Bones, if

anyone should know this, it should be you. How many ways does our world have to make one person look like another? The breakout from Azkaban would have taken a person of high magical power and ability, as would many of the other crimes that Violet Dumbledore has been charged with. The fact is that Ms. Dumbledore was almost a squib in her abilities. She has powerful forebears, and powerful children, but she did not share in that power." Harry then handed Madam Bones Violet's transcripts and test scores. "Following that path, we then attempted to carry out a rescue 'by the book'. Minerva, would you please show what happened when you approached Minister Fudge?"

"Gladly, Mr. Potter." Minerva took the memory thread of her meeting with Cornelius Fudge and placed it into the pensieve for Amelia to view. After Amelia watched the memory, Minerva drew it back into her wand, then placed it back into her head. She then picked up the narrative. "It was at that point that we decided to go over the head of the Minister in the pursuit of justice."

One at a time the people associated with the raid, other than Mad-Eye and Violet, came forward and gave their testimony in the pensieve. When all of that was finished, Amelia looked at Harry. "I notice that the actual subject of this raid is not in the room. Am I to believe that she is here somewhere?"

"Yes, that is who the Veritaserum is intended for. We wanted you to have the full story first. If you will please follow me." Harry led the way out of the drawing room and up the stairs to Violet's room. Once there, an auror administered the Veritaserum to Violet and Madam Bones began the questioning.

"Please state your full name."

"Violet Morgana Dumbledore."

"Did you free your great uncle Albus Dumbledore from Azkaban

Prison?"

"No I did not."

"Did you ever accompany the wizard known as Lord Voldemort on any raids or robberies?"

"No I have not"

"Have you ever killed anyone"

"No I have not"

"Have you ever cast an Unforgivable curse?"

"No I have not."

"Where have you been the last four weeks and what were your circumstances?"

"I was shopping in Diagon Alley at Madam Maukin's when I was kidnapped by Bellatrix Lestrange and taken to a cellar and tied up. The next day You-Know-Who and Bellatrix appeared with Uncle Albus. He was unconscious and also tied up. We were tortured daily for the next four weeks by Bellatrix Lestrange. We were fed and watered every few days, not even allowed to use the bathroom. We soiled ourselves and were cleaned magically by a Death Eater. Last night I was rescued. Uncle Albus was untied, then threw himself in front of a killing curse meant for Draco Malfoy. The next thing I knew, I was waking up here."

Madam Bones nodded at the auror who had administered the Veritaserum and he administered the antidote. Once Violet had come out from under the influence of the serum, Amelia turned to Harry and delivered the line about what a cock-up he had handed her. "I suppose that I will have to now take her into custody in preparation

for her trial."

"Madam Bones, I am afraid that I cannot allow that. If I did, Cornelius Fudge would figure some way to pay off the reward money and make her disappear. I also have, in MY basement, the Death Eater who killed Albus Dumbledore. He should have to face charges of attempted murder against Draco Malfoy and using the killing curse. If I turn them over now, Fudge would give the Death Eater the reward for Albus' body and probably have Violet kissed before she could be cleared. He has a past history of doing that, just ask Barty Crouch Junior."

"Well then, Lord Potter-Black, what do you propose? Right now you are harboring a fugitive. Actually three if you count Albus Dumbledore's body and a marked Death Eater who cast a killing curse."

"I am going to turn this on its head and nail Fudge. First I would like you to meet a couple of people. Madam Bones, I am sure that you know Rita Skeeter?" At Amelia's sour look, Harry grinned. "Rita has graciously agreed to write a story on these proceedings for The Daily Prophet, which, by the way, I and my colleagues with me from the Wizengamot happen to own 78 percent of. The other person that I would like you to meet is Miss Luna Lovegood." Luna stepped up. "I am sure that you remember Miss Lovegood from the fiasco at the Department of Mysteries. She also does free lance reporting for her father, the owner of The Quibbler. Luna, did you get Violet's testimony under Veritaserum?"

"Every word, Harry."

"Amelia, what I propose is to call a special session of the Wizengamot to give Violet a fair and impartial trial. We can blindside Fudge that way. I will also at that time produce Albus' body and the Death Eater who killed him. We will all undergo testimony under Veritaserum if necessary. Until that time, I will hold onto Violet so that

no accident will befall her. After she is cleared, I plan to call a no confidence vote on Fudge. Had he given a couple of aurors, this could have been bloodless. Cornelius Fudge has much to answer for and I plan to collect."

Amelia Bones nodded. "I suppose that I have no real choice. Very well, I will keep quiet and so will these men with me. Will the trial be soon?"

"Tomorrow. Don't make any plans." Harry escorted Madam Bones and the aurors back to the entryway so that they could portkey back to the DMLE office. "How does 10 am sound to you?"

"10:00 am is fine. I will see you then." With that, Amelia and the two aurors took hold of the portkey and it activated, leaving Harry alone in the entryway. Calling the others, Harry went back into the drawing room. "There is one more piece of business that we need to discuss. I need to speak to just the Wizengamot members here and Neville Longbottom." After the others had left, Harry sat down with the Posse. "Ok, this part may be the hardest to carry out. Neville, we need to speak with your Grandmother....."

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Ministry of Magic

Courtroom 10

"Oyez, Oyez! This special session of the Wizengamot, called by Lady Longbottom, is now in session .Grand Warlock Zabini presiding. Those with business before this body may now make your petitions!"

Lady Augusta Longbottom stood up from her seat. "Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot, I have come to the time in my life that I have decided to retire from this body. I have waited this long in order to groom my successor. This last spring, my grandson, Neville

Longbottom, proved his courage and maturity in assisting Harry Potter in foiling a plot by You-Know-Who in the Department of Mysteries. I now feel confident in granting Neville Longbottom his emancipation and naming him as my successor to my seat, the one that his father would have held. Neville," Mrs Longbottom looked fondly at her Grandson. "I am proud of you, and I know that your father and mother would also be very proud of you. Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot, I ask you to recognize the emancipation of Neville Longbottom today. I also ask you to accept my retirement from this body and confirm my successor."

"Well spoken, Lady Longbottom. Is there any one among us with a comment or objection to granting Lady Longbottom's request?"

From the left side of the aisle, Daphne Greengrass stood. "Grand Warlock, I have a comment. I would like to thank Lady Longbottom for her honorable and faithful service to this body and to our people and wish her a long life and joyous retirement. I would also like to bridge any gap in this body and offer my support and comradeship to her chosen successor, Neville Longbottom."

Zabini beamed with pride at Daphne. "Well spoken, Lady Greengrass! Are there any other comments?"

One by one the Posse stood and reinforced the sentiments given by Daphne Greengrass. At the end, Zabini called for a vote on the motions, which passed by acclaim. Neville then took the oath of membership and took the seat vacated by Lady Longbottom. Cornelius Fudge looked very satisfied that Longbottom had not moved his seat to join the rest of the Posse. If there was any friction between the Posse and the new Lord, he might be able to exploit it. Grand Warlock Zabini looked around and cleared his throat. "Is there any other business to be conducted in front of this body?"

Madam Bones stood. "Grand Warlock, there has been much in the media lately concerning alleged crimes concerning Violet

Dumbledore and Albus Dumbledore. These crimes are so heinous that the Ministry has offered rewards of 100,000 galleons for the capture of Albus Dumbledore, dead or alive, and 10,000 galleons for the capture of Violet Dumbledore. I am pleased to announce that Violet Dumbledore is to face immediate trial in these matters. Albus Dumbledore, unfortunately, was killed before he could face trial."

Fudge could hardly contain himself. This was like Christmas come early! He had no idea how the Dumbledores were captured, but then again, he didn't much care. He stood. "Madam Bones, I believe that the testimony that we have received against Violet Dumbledore is so strong that we can dispense with a trial and send her straight to Azkaban. All I need to know is who to make the reward payable to."

Amelia Bones fixed a deadly look at Fudge. "Not so fast, Cornelius. Have you so soon forgotten the injustice carried out against Sirius Black? Violet and Albus Dumbledore are and were Purebloods with certain unalienable rights. EVERY criminal defendant has the right to hear the state's case against them and the opportunity to mount a defense against that case. In this case, all of the witnesses have agreed to be examined under the influence of Veritaserum and take wizards oaths as to the veracity of their testimony. We will NOT, as long as I hold office, sweep anyone under the rug because their defense might cause discomfort among the powers that be. I would also like to inform the Minister and this court that all the circumstances are known to the press, and that representatives from both The Daily Prophet and The Quibbler are in this courtroom now to cover the trial under the Open Trial Information Act."

Fudge sat down heavily. He had not counted on this. If it was clear that Violet and Albus were innocent, he could lose a lot due to his inaction and stirring up of the lynch mob mentality. He crossed his fingers and hoped for the best. Grand Warlock Zabini nodded his approval at Bones and motioned for her to continue. She pointed her wand at the floor of the courtroom and the defendant's chair with its chains appeared. "Let the defendant, Violet Dumbledore, be brought

in to face the charges before her!"

Violet Dumbledore appeared on the floor, her arm supported by Harry's solicitor, George Steinman. He gently walked her over to the chair and instructed her to sit in it. Due to the severity of the charges, the chains bound her to the chair. Steinman then spoke. "Grand Warlock, members of the Wizengamot, I am George Steinman, counsel for Miss Dumbledore."

Zabini nodded in approval. "Welcome, Mr. Steinman. Madam bones, will you begin your questions?"

"Grand Warlock, I have a statement from Mr. Steinman that the defense is willing to stipulate to the testimony of the prosecution witnesses. The defense believes that they were, in their own minds, truthful when they testified that they saw Violet Dumbledore and Albus Dumbledore committing the crimes of which they have been charged. The defense in this case is that Violet Dumbledore and Albus Dumbledore were not involved with the crimes, that they had, in fact, been committed by persons affiliated with You-Know-Who polyjuiced to appear to be the Dumbledores. In light of this stipulation, the Prosecution rests."

"Very well, Mr. Steinman, you may begin your defense and call your first witness."

"I call Violet Dumbledore and request that she be placed under Veritaserum as well as she take a wizards oath as to the truthfulness of her testimony." The auror acting as bailiff came forward, administered the oath, then gave Violet Veritaserum. When the potion took effect, Steinman asked her the same questions that had been asked by Madam Bones, and received the same answers. Following the testimony of Violet, Steinman then called, in order, Minerva McGonagall, Harry, Jonathon Dumbledore, Draco Malfoy, Mad-Eye Moody, Fred and George Weasley to testify of the plea to Fudge and the raid. Madam Bones then pointed her wand at the floor

and a second chained chair appeared. An auror led in the Death Eater who killed Albus and strapped him into the chair.

"Permission to treat this witness as hostile and administer Veritaserum against the witnesses will?"

"Granted. Auror, please administer Veritaserum to the witness." After the auror did so, Steinman questioned the Death Eater, a Durmstrang recruit named Jazom Czeky. Czeky confirmed that he was a marked Death Eater, something proven true by exposing his arm. He also confirmed Violet's testimony that she had been a captive, along with Albus, to provide genetic material for Voldemort's polyjuice frame up of the Dumbledores. His testimony finished with him admitting to shooting the killing curse at Draco Malfoy and hitting Albus Dumbledore. After a few questions by Madam Bones, the Defense rested.

Zabini sat back in his chair, stunned by the proceedings. This had been the most dramatic trial he had ever witnessed. Fudge was also gob-smacked. It would be a miracle if he came out of this unscathed by McGonagall's testimony and his attempts to send Violet to Azkaban without a trial. Rita Skeeter was gleefully writing every word down, knowing that she was about to witness the end of an era in the Ministry. She would get not only the front page of the Prophet, she could write her own ticket after this.

"Well, I suppose that it is time to call for a vote. All in favor of conviction?" No one raised their hands. "All in favor of acquittal?" The vote was unanimous. Miss Dumbledore, you have been judged to be not guilty of the charges. You are free to go with our blessings and our condolences for the loss of your uncle. Madam Bones, Do you have any other business?"

"Yes, Grand Warlock, the DMLE charges Jazom Czeky with the following crimes. Count one, membership in an illegal terrorist organization. Count two, attempted murder of Wizengamot member

Lord Draco Malfoy. Count three, that the defendant did use the Unforgivable killing curse in the attempt to kill Lord Malfoy. Count four, that the defendant did kill Albus Dumbledore, a hostage of his terrorist organization during his attempt to kill Lord Malfoy. I ask that a trial date be set in order to allow the defendant to obtain counsel and mount a defense. The law is not just for our powerful families after all."

"Well spoken, Madam Bones. Trial for this defendant is set for two weeks from today at 10:00 am in this courtroom. Aurors, take the defendant away. Is there anyone here with more business to conduct?"

Harry stood up. "Grand Warlock, Albus Dumbledore, in his trial, was given the most severe, non capital sentence ever handed down by this court. He was sentenced to multiple life terms with a soul tracker put on him to assure that he would serve them all. In that his offenses were against myself and my line, I would like to state that the punishment handed down was cruel and unusual in its severity. The criminal known as Voldemort stripped the soul tracker from Albus in order to keep him hidden as a hostage, so the added life sentences are a moot point. In light of these facts, and because of the self sacrifice that Albus Dumbledore committed in saving the life of a member of this very body, Lord Malfoy, I hereby petition this body to vacate the unfulfilled sentence against Albus Dumbledore and issue a posthumous pardon for all crimes committed against myself or my family lines. As sole survivor of Albus' transgressions, I believe that I have that right under our laws."

"Albus Dumbledore, whatever his faults, was a hero to the wizarding world. He vanquished a Dark Lord and was firmly on the side of light. In his later life, he lost his way and paid for it with shame. It is time to call a halt to any further division. Albus once told me that there would come a time that I would have to decide what I would do, that which is easy or that which is right. It would have been easy to let my vengeance overrule my compassion, but it would not be right. The

right thing to do is to forgive his transgressions. Let him rest in peace."

One at a time, Wizengamot members stood and began clapping. Jonathon Dumbledore, having no idea that this would happen, was sitting stunned, tears running down his cheeks. He finally realized what was happening, stood and joined the applause. Zabini motioned for the members to retake their seats.

"It appears that we have another unanimous decision. I declare that Lord Potter-Black's motion to vacate the balance of the sentence against Albus Dumbledore is confirmed, as well as a posthumous pardon granted under sole survivor laws. It is the decision of this court that all honors be posthumously returned to Albus Dumbledore and his conviction be expunged from the records of the Wizengamot. Finally, is there any other business to be conducted?" Zabini groaned to himself when Neville Longbottom stood. "Yes, Lord Longbottom?"

"Grand Warlock, members of the Wizengamot. I am the newest member of this august body, however I must break tradition and bring up a matter that affects us all." He fixed a malevolent eye on Cornelius Fudge. "We have been shamed by the illegal dealings and poor judgment of our present Minister of Magic. I have turned over pensieve memories given from several members of this body testifying to bribes accepted by Minister Fudge. These were bribes given by the fathers of current members. They have also given me certified audits of their family finances showing the details of these bribes. For a year, Minister Fudge denied the return of You-Know-Who, and had the Dementor's Kiss administered to the Death Eater, Barty Crouch, Junior, the man who could have proven those charges. He also ordered the Kiss to be administered to Sirius Black, an innocent man sent to Azkaban without a trial. Only the intervention of Lord Potter-Black and a friend, Miss Hermione Granger, averted this added injustice."

"For years, Minister Fudge has lied, taken bribes, and weakened the

defenses of Magical Britain. And for what? He did it all to protect his political career. He also allowed a sociopath maniac, his assistant, to take over Hogwarts, weaken the students defenses and commit crimes against students. His chosen 'High Inquisitor', Delores Umbridge, used illegal blood quills on students in detention, attempted use of Veritaserum on an underage wizard, set two Dementors on an underage wizard and his muggle relative, and lastly, attempted to cast an Unforgivable against a student under her control. I will also be speaking with the DMLE regarding bringing up charges against Madam Umbridge in the near future. The important thing is that not only did Cornelius Fudge allow these things on his watch, he encouraged them. The question that we have before us today is this; is our current Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, a criminal or just incompetent? Either way bodes ill for our society and demands a vote of no confidence against the Minister."

Draco Malfoy stood. "Grand Warlock, it is to my family's shame that I confess that my father, Lucius Malfoy, was one of the people giving bribes to the Minister to overlook shady dealings. I would like to bring my family back into honor, and the best way that I can think of to do that is to repudiate the illegal dealings of my father. I second Lord Longbottom's call for a vote of "No Confidence".

Again, one at a time, the members of 'Potter's Posse' stood up to denounce Cornelius Fudge. Then older members, seeing which way the tide was turning, also stood to attack Fudge. This was a case of Neville starting a march and everyone joining him to make a parade. In this case, the lynch mob mentality worked to do something constructive. Zabini finally called a halt to the march.

"A motion is on the floor and has been seconded. Will the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, be removed from office by a vote of No Confidence?"

"Wait a minute! Don't I get to say anything in my defense?" Fudge was nearly foaming at the mouth in anger and panic. Should he lose

this vote, he would lose everything, including his fat pension.

"Hmm... I suppose that we should give you a chance to state your case. Go ahead Cornelius."

Fudge looked around at the members of the Wizengamot. He saw no friendly faces, and frankly, he could not think of anything that would persuade a majority to vote to retain him. He quickly took out a piece of parchment, scribbled on it and handed it to Chief Warlock Zabini. Zabini took a look and raised his eyebrows, then snorted.

"Our Minister of Magic has just handed me his resignation, effective immediately. This makes the vote of No Confidence a moot point. I am urging the members to accept Mr. Fudge's resignation and name a member here as Minister pro tem until an election can be held. All in favor of accepting Minister Fudge's resignation?" Almost every member raised their hands. "All opposed?" The members who raised their hands were not doing it in support of Fudge, they wanted him stripped of his perks and pension. They were, however, outvoted. Zabini turned to glare at Fudge.

"Cornelius, your resignation is accepted. I wouldn't be in a hurry to make plans to spend your retirement on some nice beach however. Madam Bones, Please take Former Minister Fudge into custody while you investigate these very serious crimes that he has been charged with today. I am also directing you to arrest Delores Umbridge and investigate the charges that have been leveled by Lord Longbottom. Cornelius, if convicted of these charges, you will lose your pension and be a guest of the penal system for the foreseeable future. And I don't need to have the gift of Second Sight to make that prediction."

Madam Bones stood. "Aurors, do your duty." Kingsley Shacklebolt and Tonks came forward and braced Fudge. "Cornelius Fudge, you are under arrest for bribery and malfeasance in an office of trust." Tonks removed his wand and Shacklebolt placed him in magical

handcuffs. Both shot Harry a look of triumph. This would be the most enjoyable trip to the holding cells that they had ever made.

"Until we can have an election, I would like to nominate Lady Griselda Marchbanks to act as Minister Pro Tem until an election can be held." Madam Marchbanks nodded her acceptance.

"I second the nomination," this from Harry.

"All in favor? Opposed? Lady Marchbanks, you have been approved by acclimation to serve as Minister Pro Tempore. An election for Minister shall be held sixty days from today. Your term of office shall expire fourteen days after that. Thank you for your service. Is there any more business to be conducted? Seeing none, I will entertain a motion to adjourn. Motion by Lord Avery, second by Lady Parkinson. All in favor? Opposed? This meeting of the Wizengamot is finally adjourned! Thank you for coming today."

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A/N: Next.... Dumbledore's funeral and the fallout from this chapter!

Chapter 18

The Game is Afoot

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

It was an official day of mourning in the wizarding world. This was the day that Albus Dumbledore, newly reinstated hero of the wizarding world, would be laid to rest. Although many had thought that he should be buried at Hogwarts, this was vetoed by not only the family, who wanted him buried in the family plot, but also the school's board of governors. Never had a headmaster been buried on the school grounds, even the founders had been buried away from the grounds. It was the intention of the four founders that Hogwarts should look to the future, not have the objects of hero worship planted, as it were, on the grounds. It was bad enough that the founder's houses had been so misinterpreted in such a way that cultish behavior dominated the thinking of the students over the last 1000 years, to have the relics of the founders would have been dangerously close to mirroring the muggle church that had been dominant in their time. No, Albus Dumbledore would go the way of all of the headmasters of Hogwarts, laid to rest by family and friends, then the grave location guarded by their family until the end of time.

In the common room shared by the heads of house, of which Neville Longbottom was the latest resident, all of the Lords and Ladies were frantically preparing themselves for the funeral. They were all dressed, the ladies had their makeup perfect, but as in time immemorial, the girls had decided that the males of the contingent just needed 'a few more things done to them'. After going around the lads, straightening collars, adjusting ties, brushing non-existing bits of lint from their robes, Harry was now the object of the girl's attention. Specifically, Harry's unruly hair. Pansy had attempted to use gel to make it lay down, but Harry thought that made him look like a dark haired Draco. She magically removed the gel, then tried various cosmetic spells, none of which worked. Finally, Daphne stepped up, pointed her wand

at Harry's head, and muttered a spell under her breath. His hair stood on end, then properly parted itself, laying neatly on his head. He looked in the hand mirror that Pansy offered him, and when the mirror complimented him on his hair, he turned to Daphne.

"That was brilliant! What was that spell?"

Daphne gave a sly grin. "I figured that your hair was so unruly that it must be possessed by a demon. That spell just scared the devil out of it."

At Harry's confused look, she continued. "Potter, that means that I'm not telling. If you want to have decent looking hair, you will just have to come to me." She winked, then shooed him toward the door. "Time to get going."

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Dumbledore Family Cemetery

Cardiff-By-The-Sea

The Hogwarts contingent portkeyed into the cemetery along with several security men hired by the Gringotts goblins on their behalf. There were already a half dozen aurors stationed around the cemetery to assist in crowd control. The funeral promised to be the event of the decade, since Albus had been reinstated as an official hero. The members of the reborn Order of the Phoenix would be acting as an honor guard and the vast majority of the Wizengamot would also be there; some to show their respects and the rest to make sure that he was planted deep enough that he would never again bother them. Harry and the rest of the Posse would be in the section set aside for Wizengamot members rather than with the rest of the Hogwarts students and staff who had come to pay their last respects.

The layout of the service seating was simple. There was a speaker's dais at the front of the casket, family members were seated facing that. Behind the family was the seating for the Order members, then Wizengamot members. Next came seating for Hogwarts staff and students, then Ministry employees, and finally the general public. The eulogy was to be delivered by the Minister Pro Tempore, Lady Marchbanks. Following that, there would be speeches by everyone who might have something good to say. Harry had been asked to say a few words, but he had begged off due to the fact that feelings could still be a bit raw. Harry thought it could be a bit awkward seeing as he was responsible for blowing the whistle on Albus' squeaky clean image.

This was the first time in many years that the cemetery had been accessible by anyone other than the members of the Dumbledore family. Wizarding families tended to keep their cemeteries unplottable and hidden due to the danger of bodies and graves being desecrated and dark rituals being performed by enemies with necromancy in mind. There was also the danger of inquisitive muggles discovering too much. Even at open funerals such as this, the other graves were hidden from non-family members.

About halfway through the speeches by Wizengamot members, Harry was seriously zoning out, beginning to watch other members of the audience. He was especially curious about the Dumbledores and some of the few Order members who had stayed loyal to Albus. Aberforth and Violet looked stricken, Jonathon had a bland, expressionless face, and Jennifer was upset, but not nearly as affected as her mother. The few members of the Order that Harry made eye contact with looked at him with undisguised loathing and hatred. Harry met these glances without expression, although he was smirking inside. He was supposedly this powerful weapon for the Light, but from the looks of this Light organization, they would not pee on him if he was on fire. Fortunately most of the people in the Order had no real assets that he could use in opposition to Voldemort. They were, in short, unimportant and unpleasant idiots who would

sell out their own people out of fickleness. In other words, just like the rest of the wizarding population.

Over two hours after the funeral service began, it seemed like the crowd was beginning to lose sight of what they were here to do. Harry thought that Dumbledore would have loved this, being the center of attention by all of these people. Harry was mentally wishing Albus well on his 'next great adventure', but his butt was beginning to hurt on the metal chair. He was starting to realize why Albus had always preferred those big, poofy overstuffed chairs. He and the rest of the suffering public were saved by a flash of red fire and the sad, sweet phoenix song of Fawkes. The song spoke of honors past and the sadness of what could have been. Fawkes landed on Jennifer's shoulder and leaned over to rub his face against Violet's. He then flew toward the casket and flashed out directly over it. This stunned the speaker into silence. At this point, Jonathon stood up, strolled to the dais and addressed the crowd.

"This concludes the service for Albus Dumbledore. My family would like to thank all of you for coming, you will never realize just what this means to us. If you will please leave in an orderly fashion, the actual burial will be performed by the family. Once again, thank you." With this, Jonathon left the dais and stood by the casket with the rest of his family joining him.

As the crowd began to disperse to the apparition and portkey area, Harry joined the rest of the Posse to head toward the Hogwarts group portkey area. He gave a short shake of his head as he met up with Draco. Draco gave a smirk and a very unrefined snort.

"Looks like the Order of the Ruptured Duck weren't real happy with you. I think that I would rather have them as enemies than friends."

"I know what....." At that moment, there was a disturbance back toward the casket area. Harry and Draco spun around and saw a

non-descript woman leveling her wand toward the Dumbledore family. Harry, Draco, and Daphne quickly pulled their wands and fired stunners at the woman, but the distance was too great. There were also wards placed around the gravesite that nullified hostile magic within them. The woman dropped her glamour leaving Bellatrix Lestrange pointing the wand at the family. Jennifer screamed but Jonathon just stared at Bella with a smirk on his face. Bella attempted to fire a Crucio at Jonathon, but the spell never got past the end of her wand due to the wards. Frustrated, Bella looked around frantically at the aurors and Gringotts security contingent rushing toward her, then, deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, ran off toward the side fence as fast as her legs would carry her. She jumped the fence mere feet ahead of the security forces, then disappeared as a portkey whisked her away. The Gringotts people left the chase and quickly gathered up their charges and hustled them out of the cemetery and to the portkey point. They portkeyed, not to Hogwarts, but to the private area of Gringotts. Harry was shaking with anger when they arrived.

"I swear to Merlin that I am going to kill that bitch!" The magic burst caused by rage was visible to the others, the power radiating from Harry in waves, causing the portraits on the wall to begin shaking loose from their moorings. Two goblins rushed into the portkey area, assessed the situation, then cast a dampening ward around Harry in order to save life, and more importantly, Gringotts property.

Daphne stood watching Harry in shock and not just a bit of awe. She had seen many enraged wizards in her short life, what Slytherin hadn't? She had, however, never seen anything like this, and feelings of fear, fascination, and not just a little erotic excitement fought for dominance in her mind. The excitement won the battle, and when the magic level had dropped to the point where the goblins could remove the wards, she rushed forward, took Harry's hands in hers, and looked him straight in those dreamy green eyes.

"Harry, Harry, hon. Calm down. Come on now, that's right, bring it

back inside." As Harry began to hear her calming voice, his eyes focused on her, he took a deep breath, and the wild magic faded from view. It was still present, making the hair on the backs of the other's necks stand on end. Only Daphne seemed to be unaffected by this, and when he calmed, he swept Daphne into a tight hug.

"Thank you for that," he gasped. Without a thought to the others in the room, he held her as if he would never let her go.

"Harry, I have an idea that might help. We need some privacy so we can talk." Turning around, she spoke to the rest of the contingent. "You guys go ahead back to the school, we'll catch up." Looking at the goblins, he said, "We need a private room for a bit with some tea and chocolate. Harry has had a huge power discharge and needs to recover."

"Certainly Lady Greengrass. Follow me please." Daphne and Harry gave a quick wave to the others, then followed the goblin down the hall while the rest of the party readied themselves to return to the school.

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Harry and Daphne spent the next hour in a small room, sitting in comfortable chairs across a small coffee table, holding hands and drinking their tea. Harry also ate close to a half kilo of chocolate bringing his emotions under control. When they had finished talking, Harry composed his face into an expressionless mask, then went to the door and told the security goblin that he required the presence of his account manager.

Flickaxe had watched the entire conversation that took place in the supposedly 'private' room, so when he was paged, hurried from his office to the room. Potter-Black continued to surprise him, and not in a bad way. He was also gaining quite a bit of respect for the steel-trap mind of the new Lady Greengrass. Entering the room, he

conjured a chair for himself and sat down.

"How can I assist you today, Lord Potter-Black?" He knew exactly what Harry wanted, and had already instructed Warcry to begin the process. Anything to further the reputation for efficiency that Gringotts was famous for. With all of their monitoring of important account holders, nothing much ever surprised them.

"Flickaxe, I need three documents prepared for my signature as Head of the House of Black. The first document will dissolve the marriage of Bellatrix Lestrange. This will bring her back under the control of the House. I then want her disowned from The House of Black. The third document will be a Statement of Dishonor declaring Bellatrix anathema and declaring to the Ministry and the wizarding population that, as Head of the House of Black, her life is forfeit to me as a debt of honor. Anyone assisting her shall also forfeit their lives. After I sign and seal these documents, I want them registered with the Ministry at one hour intervals. Once they have all been registered, I want them released to the media."

The three made small talk for about five minutes, then there was a knock on the door. Warcry entered, walked up to Flickaxe, and handed him some parchments.

"Lord Potter-Black, this is my new assistant, Warcry. Anytime that I am not in the office, feel free to tell him whatever you need."

"Nice to meet you, Warcry. What happened to Griphook? He was the first goblin that I ever met."

Flickaxe gave a toothy grin. "As much as I hated to lose him, Griphook received a major promotion to Account Manager. From all reports, he is doing a wonderful job in his new position."

"Well, if you happen to see him, give him my best. I hope that your new assistant is as efficient."

"Trust me, if he wasn't, I wouldn't have him working for me." Warcry, knowing the ins and outs of goblin politics, shivered at the implied threat. He covered his nervousness with what, in goblin society, would be a shy smile.

Harry took the parchments, signed them, and, dripping wax from the table candle, embossed each with the signet ring of the House of Black. "There, that's done. Flickaxe, may your gold flow as water and may you destroy your enemies. Warcry, congratulations on your promotion. May you grow wise and powerful."

"Lord Potter-Black, May your vaults overflow and your enemies die of fright at the sound of your name." This from Flickaxe.

Warcry bowed to Harry. "Thank you, Lord Potter-Black. May your gold multiply like rabbits and the bones of your enemies cover the road as a carpet." The two goblins turned to Daphne and bowed. "Lady Greengrass", then left the room.

Harry went over to the small fireplace in the room, threw a pinch of powder in the fireplace, and called out, "Hogwarts, Headmistress' Office!" He got on his knees and put his head into the flame. "Minerva?"

"Harry, are you alright?" Minerva McGonagall had been worried ever since the group had returned from the funeral without Harry and Daphne.

"Daphne and I are fine. I had a spot of trouble that Daphne helped me with, then I had some urgent business to conduct at Gringotts. There is going to be quite a bit of fallout from this situation and we need to consult with some others on what should be done about it. We will not be back at school until tomorrow morning."

"Harry, you should not be away from Hogwarts right now, there is a

huge safety risk you both you and Lady Greengrass."

"Minerva, unfortunately, this is one of those times when our duties as Heads of House overrule our duties as students. We would appreciate you assuring our dorm mates of our safety. Please tell Lord Malfoy that we will contact him this evening."

"Alright, Harry. I do not like it, but I will do it. Should I need to reach you, do you have any way I can reach you?"

"Yes, just call Dobby and have him give me the message. He is keyed into the wards."

"Very well, be safe."

"You also, Minerva."

Harry pulled his head out of the fireplace and the flame returned to its normal colour. Daphne looked at him expectantly. "Where to next, Harry?"

Harry took a piece of parchment, wrote on it, 'Harry Potter-Black lives at Walburga's House' and handed it to her. "Now, if you will just hold onto the other half of this medallion, we can go to my place." When she had done so, Harry said, "Activate!" With the familiar pull behind the navel, the portkey whisked them off to the Manor.

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Walburga's House

"Lord Black! Blinky is happy to see you! And Lady Greengrass! I is honored to greet you, fine lady!" Daphne and Harry both smiled at the little elf's exuberance.

"Blinky, please set up a light lunch for Lady Greengrass and myself in

my study." As the elf popped out, Harry offered his arm. "My Lady."

Daphne took his hand and they retired to the study for a bit of nourishment. After a light lunch of cucumber and tomato sandwiches and a bowl of pumpkin soup, Harry went to the fireplace and tossed in some floo powder. "Dumbledore Manor!" He got on his knees and called for Jonathon. "Lord Dumbledore, I am here with Lady Greengrass. May we come through?"

"Lord Potter-Black, this is not really the best time, may I ask what it concerns?"

"Certainly, it concerns the security for your sister while she is at Hogwarts."

"Come through." As Harry and Daphne stepped out of the fireplace at Dumbledore Manor, Jonathon shook Harry's hand. "Lord Potter-Black." He then took Daphne's hand and brushed his lips across it gently. "Lady Greengrass."

Harry addressed him. "Jonathon, I know that this is a bad time, and I apologise for disturbing you at this trying time. If this was not urgent, I would have waited. The upshot is that I believe that your sister might be in danger at Hogwarts from Voldemort's sympathizers." Harry then told Jonathon of his actions toward Bellatrix. "This is bound to enrage her, but I could not have her continually placing my house in danger by her actions."

"That is all well and good, but what do you propose that we do about it?"

"I propose that you insist that Jennifer move into the Head of House area. I realize that she is not an actual Head of House, but I and the other Wizengamot members will support her moving in for her protection."

"What about the Dark Families? Why should they care?"

"It only makes sense to do this," Daphne told him. "It would go a long ways to show that doing the right thing is not restricted to just the Light families. Besides," she smiled, "It is a good idea to have people on the other side of the aisle owing us a favor."

"Now THAT is an explanation that makes sense. Very well, I will bring it up to McGonagall in the morning."

"And we will make sure that all of the members sign onto it. I'll send an elf to you with the agreement." Harry stated.

"Yes, it will be nice to have another female in the dorm. There is only just so much that Patsy and I can talk about without running out of conversation," said Daphne.

They made a bit of small talk, then said their farewells and left.

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After Harry and Daphne flooed back to Walburga's House, Harry gave her the grand tour. They ended up in the room where Walburga and Orion's portrait was hanging. The couple came out to greet Harry, and Walburga disappeared into the Grimmauld Place painting to retrieve their counterparts. The two Walburgas then peered out at Daphne.

"Oh, my," said one of them. "You look almost exactly like our friend Jane Greengrass."

"She was my great grandmother, Lady Black."

Walburga gave a huge smile. "Oh, the stories that I could tell you about her! We were in the same dorm room at Hogwarts. Jane was the biggest prankster ever to pass through the school.

Daphne gasped. "I was always told that she was the perfect Slytherin student, never getting in trouble, always the perfect lady!"

The Walburgas snorted. "She was, which means that she never got caught. How much more Slytherin can you get? She made all of us take witch's oaths not to reveal any of her pranks while we were alive to keep her reputation. She signed all of her work with a picture of a lion. That way the Gryffindors would get the blame. There was this one time when she pranked the entire school. She put handlebar mustaches on all of the students, staff, elves, portraits and suits of armour. The headmaster went insane trying to pin the blame on someone. It also took a week for the charms teacher to reverse the spell."

"Merlin! That is funny! But what about your oath?"

The Walburgas smirked. "You mean the one that would kill us if we told? We're already dead, dear. Is Jane still alive?"

"Yes. She is getting up there in age, but she is still kicking."

"Well, in that case, please give her a message from us."

"Certainly. What would you like me to say?"

"Tell her that Wally says....GOTCHA!"

The couples chatted a bit longer, then Harry called for Blinky and told him to show Daphne to her room and bathroom so she could freshen up for dinner. After she left, the original Grimmauld Walburga spoke to Harry.

"My Lord, I am happy that you brought that fine young lady to meet us. She is every bit as gracious as any pureblood who I have ever met. If I may ask, what is your relationship and your intentions toward

her?"

Harry ran his hand through his hair in a gesture of mild frustration. No longer the self assured 'Lord Potter-Black', he was once again the self conscious, slightly angst ridden teen. "I really don't know. I like her, I like her a lot! I don't know how she feels about me though. Damn it, I'm only 16! What if we get really attached to each other and I die facing Voldemort?"

Orion spoke up. "Son, you cannot allow fear of the unknown to rule your life. There have been Dark Lords every generation. If we hide ourselves and our feelings for others under a rock, our world will die. If the strong do not continue their lines, they will die out and the weak will take over. Then at the first sign of a storm, they will buckle and be blown away. You have not only your responsibility to the wizarding world under that damnable prophesy, you also have the responsibility to two great houses. There is a reason that they are called 'Ancient and Most Noble.' Your ancestors of these houses are looking at you to continue our lines, adding stability to our world and not allowing it to fall into chaos. Most pureblood children learn this at their parent's knees, you have been sorely maltreated in this aspect. If you do not marry, you still need to appoint magical heirs to continue your house. You should do it anyway to insure a future. When you then have a blood heir, that would pass to them."

"Just wonderful! Just what I needed, another responsibility." Harry snorted. "I feel like the chap that was asked for his last words before being publicly hanged. He said, 'If it wasn't for the honor of the whole thing, I'd just as soon pass.'"

"Think well about it. You should enlist the goblins as allies. They have a lot at stake here as well. If something happens to you, they could lose a lot of power and prestige should you die and your vaults go to the ministry. Just remember the Golden Rule. 'He who has the gold, makes the rules.'"

"I will give serious consideration to what you have said. Thank you all. Now, if you will excuse me, I need to freshen up for dinner."

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After an exquisite dinner of roast lamb with fresh fruit from the manor garden, Harry and Daphne said their goodnights and went to their rooms, instructing Blinky to wake them at 5:30 am. Harry ran a hot bath and let the worries of the day melt from his muscles. Afterward, he put on the green silk pajamas that Blinky had laid out for him, then crawled into bed and fell into an uneasy sleep, dreaming of the day's events and mentally critiquing what he could have done differently. He then began to dream of Daphne, a hormonally charged dream that chased away the unpleasant thoughts.

It was during this dream that he felt the mattress compress next to him, and the object of his dream slip in next to him, curling up next to his chest. Harry smelled her perfume and breathed in the fresh scent of her long, black hair. Her hand grabbed his wrist, then brought his arm over her body to lay around her abdomen, brushing up against her breast. Harry's voice caught in his throat.

"Daphne, why are you here?"

"I heard you calling me in your sleep. And I wanted to come. Frankly, I am terribly attracted to you." She reached down between his legs and grasped Harry Jr. "And unless your little buddy here is lying to me, I believe that you might, just maybe, be just a little bit attracted to me."

This was uncomfortable, he had no experience with girls, but he grinned at the absurdity of it all. "Trust me, he's not lying. But as much as I am enjoying this, you should know that I am saving myself for marriage."

"I wouldn't expect anything less. I also plan to make my first sexual

partner my last. I do want you to be comfortable around me though. I also want to make it very clear that I am interested in you. Harry, you have a bright future and I want to be a big part of it." She twisted around to face him. Harry took her face in his hands and brought their faces close together.

"Hold on a second, bucko." She reached over and took his wand from his nightstand, pointed it at her mouth and muttered a spell, then did the same to him. "There we go, nice and minty fresh. Only fitting for a first kiss. Now, where were we?"

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A/N: I was having the hardest time trying to figure out how to get my females inside Harry's sphere of influence. Daphne was not hard, she is already in the same dorm area, but as you might guess, Jennifer is a whole different story. Please R&R, let me know if you like the setup.

Chapter 19

Anathema

Boy-Who-Lived Declares War!

Bellatrix Lestrange Target of 'Grey Lord's' Fury!

Exclusive to the Daily Prophet

Staff Writer Rita Skeeter

Yesterday evening, Lord Harry Potter-Black, in his capacity as Head of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Black, took decisive action against a rogue member of that family. The witch formerly known as Bellatrix Lestrange, nee Black, was, in a flurry of official documents, divorced, disowned, and declared anathema. As readers with knowledge of Pureblood law know, this allows Lord Potter-Black to carry out any punishment under the House Honor Code up to and including death. The disowning also strips the pureblood status of the former Black family member.

The witch Bellatrix NoName is a well known disciple of the Dark Lord What's-His-Name, having been broken out of Azkaban prison in a daring escape raid last year. Her former husband and brother in law are also reputed to be in You-Know-Who's inner circle.

Although the Prophet applauds this bold action by Lord Potter-Black, we do have to wonder how he plans to carry out his punishment of this powerful witch who is being protected by the most vicious Dark Lord in several centuries. We will await and report on any future developments.

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Office of the Headmistress

The meeting with Minerva McGonagall had gone quickly and smoothly. Harry and Daphne had presented the Headmistress with a petition signed by every member of what had been nicknamed the 'Noble's Dorm'. This, along with the request from Jonathon and Violet Dumbledore, convinced Minerva to order the transfer of Jennifer's belongings from her old dorm. McGonagall had ordered Dobby to prepare Jennifer's new quarters. Following the meeting, Minerva had asked Harry to stay for a few minutes.

"Harry, I read the paper this morning, and I have to ask you something. Have you lost your mind? That has to be the most outlandish thing that you have done since I have known you! How on earth do you expect to carry out your declaration against Bella Lestrangle?"

Harry stiffened and glared. When he spoke, the temperature of the room dropped several degrees. "Headmistress, whatever decisions I make in the administration of my family affairs are not up for committee review. You have overstepped your bounds, and I expect an apology."

Minerva sat back in shock. This was not the Harry Potter that she had taught and guided over the past 5 plus years. This was someone who seemed as comfortable with power and influence as any Malfoy. She quickly backpedaled. "Lord Potter-Black, I meant no offence in what I said, I am just worried. I have just become very fond of you in these past years and I don't want to see you harmed. I do apologise if I have offended you."

Harry's face thawed, but just a bit. "Between the loving home in which Albus Dumbledore placed me, and this school, I have faced more than my fair share of danger. I was a punching bag for my relations and the target of four out of five of my DADA professors. I

have fought Voldemort three times, was bitten by a bloody basilisk when I was 12 years old, and was systematically robbed by the former Headmaster and the relatives that he placed me with. I have been treated worse than one of Lucius Malfoy's house elves and manipulated by both the Ministry and staff here. Tell me, what did you tell Dumbledore after you watched the Dursleys prior to him abandoning me to their tender mercies?"

"I told him that they were the worst sort of muggles. I didn't want to leave you there, but I had to."

"Precisely. I could stand here and count down all of the times that you failed me as my head of house, but you already know those. You let yourself be manipulated by Dumbledore just as I did. The only difference is that you were old enough to know better! Since I took control of my own life, I have finally decided to live. And you know something? I don't regret it a bit. I plan to use this backward system of government and the ridiculous pureblood politics to tear this bigoted system down to the foundation and rebuild it. Getting rid of Voldemort and his lackeys will have to be the first step so that the rest of these bone heads will take me seriously."

"Now, I plan to stay here at Hogwarts and support the school and your administration, but I will not allow anyone to second guess my decisions. I believe that the school is much better with the new Dorm system. We no longer have the asinine rivalries that have been used to keep groups of students at each other's throats. It makes us less susceptible to manipulation be it from a Dumbledore or a Voldemort. Now that we have kind of cleared the air, can we start over?" Holding out his hand, he said, "My name is Harry Potter."

McGonagall smiled and took his hand in a firm grip. "Glad to meet you, I'm Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of the New Hogwarts Academy."

"Catchy name. I doubt that the Governors will let you get away with it

though." Harry grinned. "There was another thing that I had thought of the other day, but I just can't remember it right now. Oh, well. If I can think of it again, I will let you know."

McGonagall wrote on a piece of parchment. "Here is your pass into your next class. You wouldn't want to lose points for a dorm that you aren't even sleeping in now, would you?"

"Merlin forbid. Good day."

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After a full week of classes, Harry was spending some quality time with a couple of old friends, Ron and Hermione. He was feeling guilty for having neglected them for these past few weeks. Although Harry, as an emancipated student, could pretty much come and go as he wished, his friends had no such ability. When you added to his emancipation the rank that he held in the government, Harry had to admit that Draco had called it right on when he had told Harry that rank had its privileges. Harry had resorted to old habits, sneaking Ron and Hermione out through one of the Hogsmeade tunnels while he went into town in plain sight.

Meeting the pair in Honeydukes, Harry held out a portkey to Walburga's House. Arriving in the foyer, Harry was greeted by an enthusiastic Blinky.

"Blinky is so happy to see Lord Black! What would you have Blinky to do?"

Although Harry was inwardly glad to see his chief elf, he gave an inward groan. He had not taken into account the elves when he had invited Hermione to the house. He could see that she was starting to get up a head of steam. He decided to cut her off at the pass. "Blinky, I want you to meet a couple of friends. This is Ron Weasley, who is a distant cousin, and Miss Hermione Granger. Hermione is getting

ready to tell me off again for owning house elves. You see, she doesn't really approve."

Blinky looked scandalized. "You is that naughty witch that my cousin Wango tells me about. You is always trying to free elves against their will, making clothes for them and leaving them around the school! Elves will not even go in the Dorm to clean now, they make the pervert Dobby clean all of that area by hisself. Dobby has to do job of 4 elves by hisself because of your naughtiness!" He suddenly remembered that he was speaking to his master's friend. Drooping his ears, he turned to Harry. "Blinky is sorry, Lord Black. Should Blinky go iron his ears?"

Harry was having a hard time holding back his laughter. "No, Blinky, you know I don't allow you to punish yourself. What I want you to do is take Miss Granger on a tour. Take her to meet the other staff and show her the elves quarters. She can ask any question and I want you all to be completely honest with her. When you are finished, bring her into my study. And please have Sissy bring Ron and myself some tea and biscuits."

Blinky nodded to Harry, then took Hermione's hand to start the tour. Harry and Ron retired to the study to talk and wait for Hermione to return. When they entered the room, Harry walked over to the closet.

"Ron, I was planning to give this to you for Christmas, but I think that you should get some use out of it as soon as possible. You do have a game coming up in a couple of weeks." Harry brought out a shiny broom and handed it to Ron.

"Whoa Harry! This is beautiful? What kind is it?"

"It's a Cleansweep 7000K, made specifically for Keepers. Turns out that one of the investments that Sirius made before he died was to purchase 25 percent of the Cleansweep company. They wanted to send me the 7000S model that they made for Seekers, but I am not

planning to play this year. This is a pre-production model. From what I understand, this will be the standard for the British National team next year. They also have advance orders for the series from no less than 6 professional teams."

"Harry, it is really something else, but I can't accept a gift this expensive."

"First of all, we're family, so get that Weasley stubbornness in check. Secondly, don't think of it as a gift, I want you to write up performance reports on the broom each time that you use it. When the trial period is over, the company will take this broom and trade it out for a production model. And third, I'm not taking it back."

"Well, since you put it that way...."

"I'm also giving Ginny a 7000C for her to report on. She should have been a Seeker, but since she made Chaser, that will be a good broom for her. Draco will be getting the 7000S model."

"Bloody hell, Harry! You do know that we are all on different teams, don't you?"

Harry grinned. "Should be an interesting year for Quiddich at Hogwarts. Crabbe and Goyle would have been getting the Beater models, but they have a hard time stringing sentences together. They would not be very good report writers. Tell you what, ask your team's beaters if they would like to do the reports on the B model brooms. If they want to go for it, I will get them a couple. Now, let's dig into these wonderful biscuits Sissy has brought us."

"Don't have to ask me twice."

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Meanwhile, Hermione was receiving an education courtesy of Harry's

staff. After seeing the working conditions and living quarters, Hermione asked some very pointed questions about elf life. The elves had nothing but praise for Harry, they were all well fed, and had clean, neat uniforms. There was also a cash fund for anything that the elves thought that they needed and all of the elves could take time off when they wanted. Hermione also found out that house elves that were not bonded lost much of their magic along with their will to live. This explained the condition that Winky had been in. When she heard that, she asked why Dobby seemed to take to freedom so well.

"That is why Blinky calls Dobby a pervert. Dobby is not like other house elves. Blinky knows that Dobby wishes that Lord Black would make him and Winky bonded elves. He would be much better off."

"I am sincerely sorry that I have offended so many elves. I would hate for them to lose their magic because of me."

"Hogwarts elves were just teaching Miss Grangy a lesson. Miss could not have freed those elves if she wanted. Hogwarts elves are bonded to the castle and Headmaster, not students. Students are guests, not masters. Only masters can free elves."

"Well, I can see that Harry is a good employer. I just can't help but wonder what he would be spending for human help."

"Human help not be any good. House elves hold their master's secrets and are loyal to masters. Let me tell you how bad human servants are. Lord Black had these house muggles....."

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A couple of hours later, well fed and caught up on each other's lives, Harry, Ron and Hermione were sitting in the expansive library in Walburga's House. Hermione had gone dreamy eyed at the number and rarity of the book in the room. Ron dug his elbow into Harry's side and snickered.

"The day she looks at me like that is the day that I will propose. Until then...."

Hermione gave Ron a mock glare. "Fat chance of that happening. I could just see myself as Mrs. Ron Weasley. I would end up constantly pregnant and the only books in the house would be Quiddich playbooks."

"Oh, I am so deeply wounded. Besides, they wouldn't be just any playbooks, they would be Cannon's playbooks." All three got a case of the giggles over that one.

"Let me guess," said Harry. "You would have a house with 10 bedrooms, every one of them painted orange."

"Works for me, mate. So, 'Mione, when do we tie the knot and build our dream home?"

"Hmm... how about after I learn a good castration spell and get a great job?"

Ron turned a bit green. "I suppose that we could wait awhile. Say, oh, 100 years or so?"

"I'll hold you to that." Hermione gave him a peck on the cheek. "Ron, don't ever change. You and Harry are the brothers I never had. And since I am not a pureblood, I never had any great urge to sleep with my brother."

"Hey, I'll have you know that we never sleep with anyone closer than first cousins! So misunderstood." Ron wiped a non-existent tear from his eye, then grinned.

"Hermione," Harry interjected. "I need to ask you a big favor."

"And what would that be?"

"You know that Snape is working for me now?" At Hermione's nod, Harry continued. "I would like you to research the Dark Mark. You would have complete access to all of my libraries. While the Potter library does not have very many books that could be considered dark, both of the Black libraries do. You could set up shop here when you have time, and Blinky can bring any books that you would like from the Grimmauld house. Because of Kreacher's sensibilities, I wouldn't have you actually going there. He is not really crazy, just has the biases of his old mistress. Although even Walburga has gotten much better about that, all it took was making her younger and reuniting her with her husband."

"Why do you want to research the Dark Mark? I mean, I trust you, but this is quite the odd request. Sure that you aren't planning to take over from Riddle?" she said jokingly.

"What I want to do is break Riddle's back. With the deaths of so many of his big money followers ending up dead and their heirs cutting the purse strings, he is resorting to robbing muggle banks. What that did to his finances, I want to do to his recruiting and troop retention. If you can find a way to break the hold of the Dark Mark, then we can either get more spies into his ranks or convince a lot of his troops to leave him. There has to be at least a few of them who are starting to rethink their loyalties, but are terrified that he could retaliate through the Mark. We already know that the reason that they protect him so slavishly is because if he dies, so do they. If you can find something that might work, I already have Severus' consent for you to use him as a guinea pig."

"In that case, I'll do it. You will have to give me a portkey to get back and forth and a way to get books back to my dorm for the days that I can't leave. Were there any books in the Black vault? It seems that something that dark they might have wanted someplace that the Ministry couldn't find it."

"Good idea, yes there were quite a few books like that. I will have my account manager deliver them here. It is under the Fidelus so the ministry can't find it anyway. I'll have him make a duplicate portkey for you while he is at it. You can expect it by the end of next week. Now, how would you like some quality entertainment?"

"Such as..?"

"It's Quiddich night in the portrait room. Blinky!" When the elf appeared, Harry said, "Have Sissy make up a big batch of popcorn and bring up a case of butterbeer from the cellar. Then tell the other elves to take the night off. The Orions are going to be putting on a Quiddich match tonight."

"Yes, sir!" the little elf squeaked excitedly. He popped out to carry out the request. Harry turned to his guests.

"I think that it is time that you met the new and improved versions of Sirius' parents." With that, he led them off to the portrait room for an evening of drunk elves, popcorn, and Quiddich.

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Gringott's Bank

Flickaxe's Office

Flickaxe sat back and turned off the monitor he had been watching. This was an interesting development indeed. He had a pretty good idea of the type of magic used to make the Dark Mark. The fact that Harry was trying to break the power of the mark gave him a lot of hope. The goblins had secretly placed themselves squarely behind Harry in his fight against Voldemort even though they had not, and might never, announce it. At this point, they were still claiming their neutrality. It would not do for any side to take them for granted. He

would bring this up in front of the board however. Should Harry succeed in breaking the Mark's power, then might be a good time for the goblins to go public.

He would also find whatever books that might help Granger in her research and make sure that they became 'Black family heirlooms'. He made a call to Warcry.

"Go into Lord Black's vaults and begin cataloging any and all books there. Also schedule me time at the next board meeting. I will need that list by tomorrow night."

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A/N: I know that this chapter doesn't have a lot of action, but it is an important transition time. The next chapter will have the board meeting, then skip forward in time a bit. See you then! Please review... I need my fix!

Chapter 20

Busted! (pt 1)

'Noble's Dorm'

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

A month had passed and Halloween was drawing near. It seemed that it was shaping up to be a typical Potter Halloween just like the ones before. Something always seemed to happen on that day to screw up the holiday for Harry. Although Voldemort had been fairly quiet, the nattering nabobs of the press had been getting to the point of ridicule due to Harry's inability to bring Bellatrix to account for her misdeeds. He was getting frustrated himself, but at this time he could not see any way out of the situation.

He was, on the other hand, feeling a bit better about his love life. Daphne had made it known to him that she found him attractive and that she would like to go to the next step, exploring their compatibility. Harry was originally a bit gobsmacked that she would be so forward but in retrospect saw that it made perfect sense. She was, after all, the Head of her house and an equal in all ways. He still refused to allow her to pick up the cheque when they went out together. He was still a bit old fashioned about things like that. The problem that he was facing today was also associated with his love life, however it was a situation that caught him completely by surprise.

Daphne had come to his room with some shocking news. It seemed that she had gone into the girl's loo to find Jennifer Dumbledore quietly sobbing in one of the stalls. After a bit of girl-to-girl sympathy she had gotten the story behind the young lady's distress. Daphne had then sent Jennifer to her room with strict instructions not to speak to anyone about the situation until she rejoined her. She was now filling Harry in on the conversation.

"Harry, when it was all said and done, she admitted that her brother had sent her some potions to slip into your food. The poor girl, knowing her family's history with you, got a bit suspicious and took the potions down to Professor Slughorn to analyze them. It turns out that Jon Dumbledore is trying to hook you up with his little sister. The potions were a series of mild love potions that would work in small stages to make her more attractive to you without doping you up to the point that you would be so besotted that others would notice. You would find yourself falling in love with her and it would seem totally natural. Slughorn said that there was a second set of potion that would make her fall for you. Those would not have to be ingested, but could be mixed with perfume or makeup. She took all of her makeup and toiletries down to him so that he could check them, but they all came up clean. I figure that her brother would have sent the second part later in some sort of gift."

"You know Daphne, Jennifer is a nice girl. So she obviously doesn't feel that way for me and is conflicted. It's kind of nice knowing that she didn't get the Dumbledore scheming gene. I do have to wonder what her brother's motivation is though. Why on earth would he be trying to put the two of us together."

"That's just it, she does have an attraction to you but she could see that we are together and didn't want to interfere. She also said that if she were ever to date you it would be because you wanted to, not because you were doped up. That potion is really nasty because the effects are cumulative and do not wear off. After a certain amount of time there is no turning back, the effect is permanent."

"So Jennifer fancies me. That must have made it a bit awkward of a conversation."

"Not at all. You could do a lot worse than a sweet girl like her."

"What! Are you trying to tell me that you want to dump me? Is there a problem? Something I said? Something I did?"

"Whoa, Potter! Don't get you knickers in a twist. Everything is fine between us. But haven't you realized that you are going to have to end up with more than one mate?"

Harry had been drinking a butterbeer while they were talking and this last comment from Daphne caused him to spit a good portion of it across the room. "Wha... more than one wife? Is that even legal?"

"It's rare, but in wizarding society it most certainly is legal. In fact, in certain cases like yours, it is almost a duty. Think of it. You are the holder of two House titles, one Dark, one Light. If we marry, that makes three titles that we have to have heirs for. Now I don't plan on being some baby factory. Large families with a bunch of kids are okay if you are a Weasley or something, but not for most folk. If we did not allow plural marriage in cases like that, many lines would die out without an heir. Another thing to think about is the fact that an heir from a Dark witch and you, effectively a Grey Wizard, would not really be well received by light families in the Wizengamot. In our case the firstborn son would be heir to the House of Black since that line is strictly patriarchal and the second child would be the Heir to Greengrass since my line can be inherited by either sex. The Potter line is also patriarchal, something which cannot be changed. If you also married into the Dumbledore family and Jon Dumbledore had no children, then your secondborn son would be an heir through Jennifer. That line is also patriarchal. Daughters of that union could only become regents and their husbands could never take that Head of House title without being magically adopted into the clan, somewhat the way your godfather did you."

"Egad, what a headache! I have enough problems trying to figure out one female, let alone two! It sounds almost like a business merger instead of a marriage built on love."

"Of course. A lot of pureblood unions are made that way. It is really nothing new, just look at the muggle royal family. Do you really think

that these princes and princesses just happen to fall in love with each other to the exclusion of all of those many commoners out there? Harry, you are really sweet but you are also very naïve."

"Okay. So now the question is, why is Jon Dumbledore trying to set me up and what does he get out of it?"

"Why don't you ask him? Maybe in a way that he would have to tell the truth."

"Hmm... good idea. Dobby!" There was a POP and Harry found his leg in a tight hug from the little elf.

"Oh, Mr. Harry Potter sir! Dobby is so glad that he can do something for you!" Daphne was silently cracking up. What the hell was it with Potter and House Elves? She had seen one of his Quiddich "Elves Gone Wild" episodes at the manor house. He was much too lenient with the creatures, but it seemed to work for him. Those elves would die for him, not out of duty, but rather out of love.

"Dobby, I need for you to do something for me in complete secrecy..." Harry got no farther than that before Dobby began to gesture and snap his fingers, pointing at different spots on the wall and ceiling, shooting threads of magic around the room.

"Dobby, what are you doing?"

"Dobby was making it secret, turning off the goblin magic so that they cannot hear and see you." His ears drooped. "Unless Harry Potter sir does not want the goblins to not see."

"Goblins? What do you mean? Can they see me in my room here?"

"Oh, yes. The stink of goblin magic is strong here and in your houses. Did Harry Potter sir not know that the Goblins watch all important wizards everywhere?"

"Uh, no I didn't. Daphne, do you know anything about this?"

Daphne was turning red. "No I didn't. What do you mean by 'all important wizards'?"

"Dobby means just that. Anyone who can help or hurt the Goblins are watched. Dobby thought all wizards knew about it and just wanted the Goblins to see. House elves that are bonded to a house cannot see the goblin eye and ear magic unless they know about it. But many times elves find out but then forget."

Harry was putting two and two together and coming up with a very ugly number four. He remembered the scene in Flickaxe's office where he watched Albus Dumbledore scurrying around his office trying to retrieve Harry's belongings that were disappearing back into Harry's vault. He also thought of the great service that the Goblins at Gringotts had given him, having things prepared seemingly before he even requested them and always having the right answers to his question. Well, of course they knew the answers, they had time to research the questions! Harry was beginning to see red when Daphne took his arm to calm him down.

"Okay, first things first. Harry, what did you originally call Dobby in for?"

"Oh yeah, Dobby, I want you to go to the house where Severus Snape is staying and tell him that I need some Veritaserum. Then I want you to go to all of my houses and tell every elf that I want them here in the girl's bathroom on the second floor at seven o'clock tomorrow evening. Understood?"

"Oh yes Harry Potter sir!" Dobby looked a bit wistfully at Harry, then asked, "Is that all Harry Potter sir?"

Harry looked at him, then remembered what Blinky had told him.

"Dobby, how is Winky?"

"Winky is still very sad, Mr. Harry Potter sir. She is still drinking and not taking care of herself. She is here at Hogwarts, but she wants to be a real family elf again. Dobby is afearing that Winky will just waste away."

"Dobby, do you think that Winky would like to be my elf? And even more than that, would you like to be my elf?" Harry was not prepared for the love mugging that he received from Dobby.

"Oh, yes, yes! Dobby has always wanted to be Mr. Harry Potter sir's elf! Dobby knows that Winky also wants to have a real master, one who would be kind to her." Dobby suddenly looked down and scuffed his foot like a small child. "Mr. Harry Potter sir, Dobby would also like Winky to be his Elfwife."

"Well Dobby, if Winky is agreeable to that, so am I. You two would be my personal elves here at the school. When we went to one of my houses you would help either Kreacher or Blinky, but at Potter Manor you would be my number one elves. So ask Winky about it before you go and if she is agreeable then turn in your notice to the Headmistress. Do not tell her who you are going to be working for however."

"Thank you, thank you Mr. Harry Potter sir! Dobby will do that now!" With that, he popped out of the room. Harry then realized something.

"This could be pretty convenient. Dobby was so excited that he didn't take down his Goblin silencing charm."

"So, what are you going to do about these situations? Dumbledore and the goblins?"

"I have a few ideas. First, Jon Dumbledore. I plan to....."

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Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's Office

Flickaxe and Warcry had just come in from the Board meeting where they had discussed assistance to Harry Potter in order to help him carry out his threats against Bellatrix Lestrange. They had talked for quite a while but nothing solid had come out of it. They also discussed the various tutors that the Nobles would be employing. All in all it was a wash. The tutors were doing their jobs well and helping to bring Potter's attitude in line with other wizards of privilege rather than the plebian attitude of the commoners. One report that was a bit disturbing was that there seemed to be a budding movement that was very dissatisfied with the way the government was set up. This organization appeared to be made up of all commoners. It would bear watching.

Warcry went to the monitor room and began scanning to see if anything interesting was going on. He looked at all of Harry's homes, the common room and McGonagall's office. When he got to Harry's room however, he got a surprise. Nothing showed on the screen and there was no sound. He called Flickaxe.

"Sir, I think that you need to see this."

Flickaxe came in, looked at the screen and said, "See what?"

"That's just it, sir. This should be showing Lord Potter-Black's room. Either something is blocking it or the charm has failed."

"I doubt that anything is blocking it, wizards can't even detect that charm. Is everything else working?" At Warcry's nod he continued, "The idiot that put up the charm must not have used enough power. Find out what incompetent did the job and have him fired. I'm running

a bit low on snacks, that should take care of it."

"Yes sir, I'm right on it."

Life was good.

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Moaning Myrtle's Bathroom

Harry entered the bathroom to find quite an amazing sight. He did not realize that he owned this many elves! The bathroom was literally packed with elves. They were on the floor, balancing themselves atop the stall dividers, smaller elves sitting on the shoulders of taller elves, on the sinks and the towel racks. He cleared his throat for silence.

"First things first." He walked over to the sink, cleared the elves off it and hissed in Parceltongue. "Open!" The elves gasped as one when the sink opened exposing the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

"Dobby, go down and check for any goblin monitoring magic. If it is there, get rid of it. I kind of doubt that there is any, it takes a Parcelmouth to open it, but you never know." Dobby slid down the slide, but Harry heard a distinctive "Whee!" coming from the hole. Dobby popped back a few minutes later.

"Mr. Harry Potter sir, there was nothing from the Goblins down there. Did Mr. Harry Potter sir know that there is a really big dead snake in there?"

"Oh, yeah, the basilisk. Is it pretty rotten?"

"Oh no sir. Basilisks do not rot. Their poison kills of the rotting bugs

that might destroy the carcass."

"Wow. I bet that thing would be worth a fortune in potions ingredients. First order of business is to smuggle Severus Snape into here and let him harvest all of the good parts. I need you guys to help him. Then it should be skinned and the skin preserved. I would bet that skin should be worth quite a bit also. When the basilisk has been harvested, get rid of the leftovers. Once you guys know the location, can you pop in there without me opening up the chamber?"

"Oh, yes." Blinky stated. "We will need you to let in Mr. Snape though."

"Good. When you get him, let me know and I will open it. What I need from everyone is to make the place into a secure meeting and training area. I want to make sure that no one can monitor it, Goblin or otherwise. It needs to be cleaned from top to bottom, a conference table and chairs put in, the whole works. Kreacher, any and all books and magical articles I want put into the Black vaults. I also want stairs built in place of that slide. Try to get that done first, Snape will need them. I also have to figure out how to change the password to English so that other trusted people can open the chamber. So how about most of you getting started on that. Kreacher, Dobby, Winky, and Blinky, please stay up here for a minute."

Most of the elves popped out to begin work leaving the two supervisor elves and the two free elves. Kreacher and Blinky gave distrustful looks at the 'pervert' free elves. Harry walked over to Winky and Dobby. "So Winky, have you decided if you want to be bonded to me?"

"Oh, yes Master Harry! Winky wants to be your elf more than anything!" Hearing that, the supervisor elves softened their gaze toward Winky. Harry then asked her if she wanted to be Dobby's Elfwife. When she agreed, Harry asked what needed to be done to bind the two elves to him.

Dobby and Winky bowed in front of him and offered him the pieces of clothing that they had been freed with. Dobby also vanished the other sock and the 23 knitted hats that Hermione had left around the dorm in her misguided attempt to free the Hogwarts elves. Harry then took the clothes and promised to care for and protect them. The elves joined hands and Harry gave them permission to be mates. There was a flash of magic and then the two were dressed in Potter House uniforms. Winky looked like a new elf, no longer a sopping drunk, but rather a smart, clear eyed, almost cute, elf. Kreacher and Blinky congratulated them on the fact that they were no longer 'perverts' and wished them good fortune and much fertility.

After telling them to inform him when Snape arrived, the elves popped into the chamber and Harry then closed the entrance.

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Harry then went to the Noble's dorm and, one at a time, took the members into his room and informed them about the goblin monitoring. He got them to promise not to give the game away, but that they should say nothing in their rooms that they didn't want the goblins to hear. Harry told them that they would soon have a way to meet without fear of being overheard. He also asked them to think of ways to turn the situation to their advantage.

The last thing he did before bed was to send an owl to Jonathon Dumbledore inviting him to dinner at Potter Manor the next weekend.

Chapter 21

Busted (pt 2)

Disclaimer: Yada, yada, yada!

A/N: So now that Deathly Hallows has been released, I want to remind you folks that this is still an AU fic and as such will not be anywhere close to canon. I had originally said that there would be no Horcruxes, I may change that to a single horcrux simply to explain the reason that Voldemort didn't die the first time. Or maybe not. I might keep you guessing until the end. Or not. (I can be such a bastard sometimes

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Defense Against the Dark Arts Classroom

"Aarrgghh!!"

Harry Potter Black was frustrated and Professor Kiro Tashimoto was not doing anything to help his frustration, sitting cross-legged on his desk smiling beatifically down onto Harry like some skinny Buddha. The lesson had been on silent spellcasting, something that Harry needed to know for a number of reasons, but he was having absolutely no success. He was not the only one but he was used to being number one in DADA whenever it was taught by a competent instructor. Harry couldn't blame Tashimoto for his lack of success, after all, Hermione, Neville, Daphne and Draco had all managed to do the exercise. Goyle even had some limited success, for Merlin's sake! Now Harry was getting a bit of one-on-one help from the Professor.

"What the bloody hell am I doing wrong? This is giving me more

problems than Occlumency ever did!"

Tashimoto looked at him sharply. "If you can perform Occlumency, then you should have no problems with silent spellcasting."

"Really. Well, that may just be the problem then. I am lousy at Occlumency. The Legimens I know can read my bloody mind easier than child's first reader book. When Snape gave me Occlumency lessons, he would tell me to clear my mind, and then drive through my brain like it was the M 4 motorway."

"That's all he said? Never told you how to clear your mind or how to build your shields and other defenses?"

"Nope. I honestly think that he had instructions from Dumbledore to make my mind more open to Voldemort. It was after those 'lessons' that I had my visions from Voldemort that ended up getting Sirius killed."

"Really... and he is supposed to be on your side? Just how does that work?"

Harry laughed. "Severus Snape is a Slytherin through and through. I have something that he wants, he has something that I want, and so we work together. I believe that the muggles refer to it as 'enlightened self interest.' I made him take an oath to never betray me as part of his employment contract. In return, he is no longer required to risk his neck as a spy or front line fighter."

"It also helps," Harry continued, "That Severus no longer owes a life debt to me that was passed down when my father died. Dad had saved his life after Sirius pulled a stupid prank on Severus that would have gotten Snape killed. Severus already hated my father, this made it even worse. Then to pass that responsibility to care for my life, me, the kid who is almost a carbon copy of the guy Snape hated, had to be really hard on him. The thing about Severus though is that

even though he is a brilliant Potions Master and is very talented in the Dark Arts, he is lousy at math. Can you believe that after saving my life numerous times, he still thought he owed a life debt? He was furious when McGonagall and I told him that not only was his debt more than discharged, but that I owed him no less than 7 life debts! But of course, being Slytherin, he did not absolve me of those debts. Probably is hanging on to them like cosmic 'get out of jail free' cards."

Kiro snickered. "Alright Potter-san, I am going to do something, give you an exercise that will not only help you with your silent spellcasting, but will also help you with Occlumency. First, sit down in a meditative position like I am in." Tashimoto waited while Harry got into position. "Now turn your wand so that you are pointing it at yourself." Once Harry had done this, Kiro pointed his wand at Harry. Suddenly Harry found himself petrified, unable to move or speak.

"Now what you need to do is to find your centre. The way that you will do this is to imagine a peaceful place, somewhere that you feel safe. You will then need to quit allowing all of your worries and fears to dominate your thinking. Explore your body in your thoughts, how everything fits together and works. Follow your magic into yourself; go to your centre, your magical core. Explore your core; see what the magic looks like. Once you have done this, think of the spell that you want to use, that which will release you from my bindings. Think of what you want the spell to do. When you have that fixed in your mind, take hold of some of your magic with your mind and bring it out of your core, through your body and down your arm and through your wand." He checked his watch. "Dinner is in two and a half hours. I hope to see you there. Do not forget to relock the door." Tashimoto got up, walked to the door, and waved his hand, extinguishing the lights. Harry heard the door close and lock in the darkness as his instructor left the room.

"I can't believe that bastard did that!" Harry raged mentally. "When I get out, I am going to frigging kill him!"

Harry continued with his silent rant for about another five minutes before he realized that it was not going to help. He then relaxed and began to review what he had been told. He wracked his brain for about fifteen minutes before he came to the inescapable conclusion that he had never know a safe place, at least not one that he could remember. The closest he came was Walburga's house and Potter Manor. Unfortunately they were both too distracting with the multitude of servants and animated portraits.

"Safe place, safe place, safe, safe," he thought. All at once he got a vision of the Potter vault at Gringotts. He remembered the numerous safety features and protections on the vault. "That's it! That vault has to be the safest place on earth!" Harry fixed his thoughts on the vault, then mentally closed the door and sealed it. He walked over to a comfortable couch, and then systematically began to vanish the other contents of the vault so that they would not distract him. He ended up with the couch in the centre of an empty room buried miles beneath the surface with the best protections known to man and goblinkind. He then lay back and began the next part of the exercise.

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The Great Hall

Later that evening

Kiro Tashimoto, sitting at the teacher's table, gave a silent cheer as Harry entered the hall and made his way toward the sixth year's table while giving his professor a small scowl. Just before Harry sat down, Kiro raised his cup toward him in a wordless toast. Harry smirked and gave a small bow before sitting down and engaging Ron Weasley in conversation. He kept a close watch on Harry in the event that the lad might attempt to silently hex him. From what he could see, both of Harry's hands were on the table in plain sight with no wand in sight. Just as he was beginning to relax, he began to smell smoke. The next second, he was jumping out of his chair, dancing while

attempting to put out the small flame that was scorching his right toes.

After shooting water out of his wand to put out the fire, something which brought great amusement to the students and his fellow teacher's alike, Kiro stalked down to Harry's table, planted himself in front of it and demanded, "Explain!"

Harry stood up, gave a bow, then said, "Tashimoto-san, the exercise that you assigned was very helpful. It took just 30 minutes after finding my centre to perform the counter spell successfully. I then realized that if I was focusing my spell down my arm and into my wand, I should also be able to do the same thing while sending it out through my fingers instead of my wand."

Kiro was shocked. He had never really considered that aspect of the exercise, using a different method for wandless magic. "It seems to have worked, how do you feel?"

"Tired. It seems that the wand not only focuses the magic, it also amplifies it. Had I performed that spell with my wand, I probably could have torched the entire table. I spent the rest of the time that I had before dinner practicing. It is a good thing that I have finished my homework, I am going to have to rest."

"Very well. Beginning Monday, I will work with you to increase your stamina. See me after classes then. I suggest that you eat some high energy foods tonight. Pasta, bread, and chocolates would be good choices. Good night, Potter-san."

Ron turned to Harry after the professor had returned to the high table. "That was wicked! Any chance that you could teach me that?"

Harry got an evil look on his face, something like the twins when they were anticipating watching one of their pranks catching a victim unaware. "Sure thing, Ron. How about Sunday morning. Make sure

that your homework is all done and I will show you the same way that the Professor taught me." Harry was mentally calculating the time. "Let's see, breakfast is over at eight o'clock, lunch is at noon, knowing Ron's appetite, he won't let a little thing like being petrified stop him from eating. Hell, with food as the reward, he could become a full mage by lunchtime." Ron completely missed Harry's look, so excited was he to learn this new magic.

"Awesome! Think of the possibilities. When I am working on strategies, I will be sure to include that into the equation." Harry nodded, his mouth too full of bread at that moment to even think of speaking. He needed to finish eating and get to bed since he needed to prepare for Jonathon Dumbledore's dinner visit to Potter Manor the next evening.

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Potter Manor

The dinner had been quite the success and the two Lord's were preparing to retire to Harry's study for some friendly conversation. Dumbledore was silently wondering what Harry wanted, he knew what he hoped Harry wanted, but did not want to get his hopes up too high.

"Lord Dumbledore", Harry said formally. By using his title in a casual setting, Harry was showing that he was initiating negotiations either at a political or head of family level. "I invited you over tonight on a personal matter. I find that I am very attracted to your sister and I would like to ask your permission to begin courting her."

"Yes!" Dumbledore thought. "Little sister may have finally done something right and figured out how to slip the potions to him. So now to cut the best possible deal. I will probably have to allow him to court other girls for the Dark family heir, but I need to make sure that Jennifer is the only Light witch." "Lord Potter, I was not really

expecting this, but if my sister is agreeable, we can begin negotiations. Now that your ancestry has been affirmed to be Pureblood," Dumbledore did not mention the reason that he knew Harry to be Pureblood, that of his great-uncle's crime against Lily and Petunia. "We now need to work out details. I assume that you will be planning multiple marriages at a future date to fulfill your inheritance obligations?"

"Yes, although I would agree to Jennifer being the only Light witch unless she proved to be infertile. I do have a responsibility, of course." Harry had gotten details on the fine art of matrimonial negotiations from Daphne and Draco, however this did not make him feel any better about the whole thing. It seemed more like bargaining for some sort of breeder animal, a dog or racehorse perhaps. Certainly not a human being with feelings and rights of her own. He thought that he was going to feel somewhat soiled when this was done.

"Yes, of course, I would expect no less. In the event of multiple matrimonyes, can you provide for the large, extended families that I can foresee you having? I would not like Jennifer's heir's inheritance going to children other than her own."

Harry picked up a folder and passed it to Jonathon. "My Potter portfolio. I am not showing you the Black portfolio because it does not concern these negotiations other than to say that it is quite large enough to cover several generations without any additional income. That said, I am actively making investments in both portfolios that are yielding better than acceptable returns."

Jonathon took a look at the portfolio and, although he kept his face impassive, was shocked. The statement of net worth in front of him was enough to bring joy to his flinty little heart. Potter was worth over double what he was! And that did not include the Black fortune. He carefully modulated his voice so that he wouldn't squeak in surprise. "This appears to be well in order, Lord Potter. I do have one more

question. If necessary, would you be willing to provide an heir to the Dumbledore family?"

Now it was Harry's turn to be shocked. This he did not expect. Did Dumbledore have some sort of health problem? Or was he just wary that he might not survive the war to marry and provide an heir. "I assume that the Dumbledore line is patriarchal?"

"Yes it is. I just want to make sure that all of the possibilities are covered." "Like the possibility that someone would actually want to breed with a woman... and that I might need to kill Potter off someday. After he brings down the Dark Lord, of course."

"That would be acceptable. In the event that I have one son, should something happen to you, he would become Potter-Dumbledore and be your heir. Should I have two sons from Jennifer, the second could be your heir and become Dumbledore. He would have the option of using the name Potter in informal settings."

"I would agree to that. In that case, Lord Potter, I give permission for you to court my sister Jennifer."

They touched wands together, sealing the deal. Harry, sticking to the formula, asked Jonathon to have a drink to celebrate the possible joining of their two families. When Jonathon agreed, Harry sent Dobby down to the cellar for a bottle of aged cognac. Dobby brought the cognac and two glasses, poured the drinks and served them. They toasted and downed their drinks. Harry then poured a second.

"I know the first drink was a toast, but this should be savored."

"I agree. Marvelous stuff." Harry waited for the effects of the Veritaserum that Dobby had put in Jonathon's glass to show, then cast a mild cheering charm and a nice little charm that made the recipient trust the caster. He did these wandlessly and silently. He then held up his glass in a small mock salute.

"Jonathon, those potions that you gave your sister were brilliant. Did you brew them yourself?"

"Oh, no", Jonathon replied happily. "My mother brews all of our potions, I am abysmal at the subject. Mum does it just right though, even puts in flavoring so that they go down well."

"I am surprised that you thought that Jennifer needed a potion. She is rather beautiful, you know. Why were you so eager to have me in the family, anyway?"

"Three reasons, really. The first is, of course, that you are filthy rich. Couldn't have little sister falling for some Weasley after all. Then there is the fact that I need an heir. It is not as if I will be supplying one. And last of all, of course, is revenge. Now I know that you did not frame Uncle Albus, but Mum and Granddad don't see it that way. I am under a lot of pressure to undermine you and finish off the job that Uncle started. Once you provide an heir, then it doesn't matter if You-know-Who kills you off. In fact, that would probably be preferable." Jonathon leaned in, as if to share a secret. "With our fortunes tied together, I, then my nephew would be the wealthiest wizards out there. And that does not even count the Hufflepuff fortune, although no one knows how much that is worth."

"What do you mean, the Hufflepuff fortune? Are you related to Hufflepuff?"

"No silly, you are. Uncle Albus was sure that you were an heir to Gryffindor, but that turned out to be Weasley. He was able to hide that long before Arthur Weasley even went to school. Or at least not reveal it. Gryffindor was the youngest son in his line, so he set up his inheritance to go to the youngest son of his line. Said that the oldest sons always got the gravy while the youngest lost out. Arthur Weasley is the current heir, then Ron will be the heir after him. Hufflepuff on the other hand, can be inherited by either sex. The

reason that Albus sent your mother away was so she would not be recognized as the heir. When the Sorting Hat put her in Gryffindor it just confirmed his decision. He did do a heritage test on you once while you were in the hospital wing, I believe in your first year."

"How did you find out all of these things? I didn't see anything like that in his journals."

"Oh, that's because the really secret parts of the journals can only be read by a Dumbledore. What you saw, as bad as they were, were only the parts that would not cause too much damage if they were discovered. Smart, don't you think?"

"Certainly was smart. Why did you say that you would not be providing an heir?"

"Why, because I am a poofster, of course. As gay as the 1890s. I couldn't begin to imagine actually having to sleep with a woman! EEWW!" Dumbledore shivered. "Of course, Granddad doesn't know. Mum does, but she told Granddad that I had a broom accident. Or was it a potions accident... never mind, not important."

"I am curious though. If Weasley is heir to Gryffindor, why was I able to use his sword back in my second year? I was told it was because I was a true Gryffindor."

"Posh. It has nothing to do with blood or house affiliation. It's all attitude. You have Gryffindor attitude. A Slytherin could have used the sword if he went mental and did something stupidly brave. A true heir, however, can wield it as a master. That is why no Weasley was ever allowed to touch it after Albus got his hands on it. It would have been obvious who it belonged to had that happened."

Harry could see that the Veritaserum was wearing off, so he canceled the charms. Jonathon shook his head, then gave Harry a glare. "Oops, looks like I might have said a bit much. Not nice, Lord

Potter."

Harry grinned. "Lord Dumbledore, or may I call you Jonathon? This is called 'laying all your cards on the table'. Now as I see it, you have some things that you do not want to be made public. I already knew about the potions, by the way. You won't even need to give your sister any, she already fancies me. Pretty smart, but also pretty clumsy. Of course, the things that I learned under the Veritaserum I would not be able to really use, other than for informational purposes, since I didn't have any witnesses. But both of us know what kind of nasty people work in the press, and they can ruin a person with rumours. I would hate for something like that to happen to a possible relative. As far as your heir, Should your sister and I get married, I will be happy to attempt to provide one for you. On the other items, especially the revenge part, I believe that it is time for some new negotiations. And when we finish, I will want an Unbreakable Vow from you. Understood?" Harry looked absolutely feral.

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When Jonathon Dumbledore left Potter Manor, he had a whole new outlook regarding Harry Potter-Black. After he shook hands and left, he carefully counted his fingers to make sure that Harry had returned all of them. For better or for worse, it looked like the Dumbledore fortune and name were once again dependant on Potter's good graces.

Harry relaxed, lit up a Cuban cigar and poured another snifter of cognac. He then called for Dobby. When Dobby appeared, he brought him close and whispered in his ear. "Are the goblin monitoring charms still disabled in this room?"

"Oh yes, Master Harry! Dobby made sure of it."

"Good, here is what I want you to do for me now....."

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Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's Office

Warcry entered the office to begin his monitoring shift, trying to track down Harry. He first tried the dorm room, but the charms were still not working. He snickered and reached over to grab a bite of jerky 'donated' by the unfortunate installer who had cast the faulty monitoring charms. As he turned the dial looking for Harry in different places, his snicker died in his throat and all of a sudden the jerky got very dry and hard to swallow. All of the monitoring charms were coming up blank. That is until he got to the study at Walburga's House. There was a house elf sitting on Harry's desk holding up his finger in the universal one-fingered salute. The elf then waved and popped out, leaving a sign that read:

Flickaxe

You Are Busted!

Owl me

Chapter 22

Flickaxe's Dilemma

Potter Manor

Flickaxe and Warcry came through the floo to a hostile audience. Harry was there with every house elf in his employ. He had also run Extendable Ears from his drawing room into his study so that Daphne and Draco could hear in the event that there was a problem. Mad-Eye Moody was behind a fake panel with instructions to capture the Goblins in the event that they tried to cause harm to Harry. Harry had done some research into just what would happen to the goblins should they be exposed. While the cannibalism aspect had surprised him, he was not as shocked as he might have been. After all, goblins were a warlike race with a thin veneer of civility showing to the public.

"Lord Potter-Black..." Flickaxe began.

"Please, sit." This was not a suggestion or invitation, and the goblins recognized it for what it was, a command to a subordinate. "Have some tea and snacks. I'm sorry that I don't have any of your regular snacks, beef jerky was all I could get at such short notice. The results of these negotiations will decide whether or not I will have goblin jerky for the next meeting, be it with you or your replacements." Harry's voice became hard. "Flickaxe, I was very disappointed that you have had mine and my friend's homes and workplaces wired. And that this is standard procedure for all important account holders. Tell me, what would happen if word got out that you were responsible for letting this secret get out? Disclosing goblin secrets.... And should I blow the whistle to the rest of the wizarding world, what do you think would happen to Gringotts and the Goblin Nation?"

Flickaxe gulped. "I would be slowly roasted alive over a low heat to draw out my suffering. The Goblin Nation would be completely destroyed, or at least have to fight a war that would decimate both

our peoples. Gringotts would fall to the wizards since there are many more of you than there are Goblins."

"I thought so. Now, I must warn you that any sign of bad faith will result in you being delivered to your employers, trussed up, with a note telling them that you are responsible for the fall of your bank. There is no way that you can get anything past these 25 house elves." The elves were glaring daggers at the unfortunate goblins. "There are also others listening who will spread the word to every Gringotts account holder telling them of your duplicity. There will be protections in place long after this meeting is over, so don't get any ideas that I can have some sort of 'accident' Is all of this understood?"

The two goblins nodded in defeat. "Excellent. Let me tell you what I expect from you in the future...."

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Three hours later, the two goblins headed back to their office, glad to have escaped with their skins intact. They had to give up a lot, but at least they would not become the main dishes for the next Board dinner. The terms of the agreement were as follows:

Harry and the other Nobles in his direct circle would allow limited monitoring, but they would have 'privacy zones' where the goblins could not follow. Harry originally wanted to do away with all monitoring, but the goblins were insistent that should that happen, their superiors would get suspicious and have them replaced, with new monitoring brought in. If the new monitoring was discovered, the goblins might panic and begin another bloody revolt.

The goblins were to pass on any information that they received about other account holders which might affect Harry and his allies.

In return for certain monetary considerations, goblin hit teams would

be made available to Harry to assist him in shortening the war. This would go into effect immediately, with orders to the team to kidnap Bellatrix Lestrange. This had been Ron's idea to not only take care of a major problem, Bella, but also pull the ultimate prank on Voldemort.

The goblins were to find out, by any means necessary, what Voldemort's troop level was, names and locations. How this was to be done was not important to Harry, just that it be done. The Goblins assured him that they could do this. They were also to find out who all of Voldemort's sympathizers in the Ministry and Wizengamot were. Harry also wanted blackmail material on these people.

Lastly, the Flickaxe and Warcry were to begin to promote the idea of Gringotts and the Goblin Nation allying with Harry to defeat Voldemort. He wanted the Goblin's support, but did not want them to go public with it. Ron had come up with a long range plan to deal with Voldemort, but it would take the cooperation of the Goblin Nation to implement it.

In return, Harry would write a letter to the Gringotts Board telling them of his satisfaction with the way that Flickaxe was handling his accounts. The two goblins signed a blood oath to carry out the terms of the agreement. Harry did not sign since it was not really an agreement as much as it was a surrender. He simply gave his word to carry out his portion. Warcry was also enjoined from carrying out any subterfuge against Flickaxe.

After the goblins left, Moody, Draco and Daphne joined Harry in the drawing room. This was to be one of the privacy zones in Potter manor, with the others being the bedrooms and bathrooms. Flickaxe had reactivated the other rooms. A crew of House elves would take Warcry through the other homes and school areas to activate the ones allowed and remove the others. The other Nobles had similar plans for their homes and rooms. They would each "catch" their account holders monitoring them and use the same blackmail on their goblins. That way all of their account managers would be drawn

into the conspiracy, each of them believing that they were the only ones. Harry briefly wondered what Griphook's reaction would be to all of this, but it was just a passing thought, Draco and Pansy would be the ones blackmailing him.

"Well, that was interesting," remarked Daphne. "You were sorted into the wrong house."

"Not at all, Lass," said Moody. "Just because someone is too brave for his own good doesn't mean that he can't be devious and underhanded."

"I'll take that as a complement, I think," said Harry. "Anyway, is everything in place to receive Bellatrix?"

"Sure is. When she arrives, I'll harvest the needed hair and shove her in my trunk. All I need to do is go spring our other 'guest' from custody. I should have her back in a very short while. Amelia is going to release her on a low bail. A 'grateful former student' will be putting up the cash for her bail. She is stupid enough to believe that she might still have a supporter from Hogwarts that might do that."

"And you have no problem using an Unforgivable on her?"

"None at all, Lad. Had to do it many times in the first war. And after all, it's the least of them. Not as if I am going to kill her after all."

"Yes, but he might."

"That's her problem, not mine. She acts like one of his toadies, after all. Besides, it might just mellow out both of them."

"That will be the day."

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12 Grimmauld Place

London

Less than a week after Harry had returned to school following the negotiations at Potter Manor, Flickaxe had Moody to announce the capture of Bellatrix Lestrange. Since Harry keyed Moody into the wards at Grimmauld Place, it was decided that she would be delivered there. Moody had already snatched Delores Umbridge following her release on bail from Ministry custody. At the present time, she was 'on ice' in Moody's trunk. He had promised her that if she cooperated with him that all charges would be dropped in her criminal trial. She bought the story and was giving a minimum of problems during her stay. She did not know that Harry and company was behind the operation, only that Moody would put pressure on Harry to drop all charges from his end. Without his testimony, the rest of the case would not be worth prosecuting.

The capture of Bellatrix had gone off without a hitch. Taking advantage of the goblin's policy of non-interference and neutrality, Voldemort had tasked Bella with the chore of exchanging a few hundred thousand pounds sterling for galleons to pay his Death Eaters and Ministry sympathizers. The muggle money had come from the rash of bank robberies he had been carrying out. The Death Eaters had gotten the robberies down to a science, dressing in muggle clothing, going into a bank and discretely putting the tellers under the Imperius Curse, having them deliver the contents of their drawers and vaults to the robbers, then continuing their day as if nothing had happened. Once away from the banks, the Death Eaters would drop their glamours and blend into the crowd. So far they had not hit any banks affiliated with Gringotts.

This particular day, Bella had entered Gringotts under a glamour carrying a bottomless bag. Because of the size of the transaction, the goblin teller steered her to a private room to conduct the transaction. She watched while the goblins counted out the pounds and tabulated

the exchange rate. They passed the galleons over to her and watched while she put them in her bag. As she got ready to leave, she was stunned, bound and taken out of the room through a different door. The goblins then took her through the floo to Grimmauld Place, turning her over to Moody.

"So, are we square?" Moody asked when the prisoner had been turned over.

"Yes we are," said the Hit Goblin in charge of the operation. "We exchanged the British Pounds for Leprechaun Gold. It will disappear tomorrow so make sure that you do what you need to do before then. We kept the muggle money as payment for the snatch operation."

Moody grinned. "Old Snake Face is going to crap his pants when the gold disappears but he won't blame you. Nice doing business with you."

The Goblin gave a curt bow. "Likewise. Fair profit to you, sir." With that, the hit team left through the floo, using their own special floo powder that would take them into the secure area of the bank.

Moody levitated Bellatrix into his trunk in a separate compartment from Umbridge. He then firecalled the Headmistress and asked McGonagall to give Harry the message that phase one had been completed. Finishing that call, he grabbed another pinch of powder and called Severus Snape. A moment later, Snape came through the fireplace. Snape carried a vial of Veritaserum to be used in the questioning of Bellatrix. The two men went down into the trunk. Snape stared at Bellatrix for a while before administering the Veritaserum and enervating the prisoner.

"Having second thoughts, Snape?" asked Moody.

"Not at all. I'm just savoring the sight of my ex comrade in this position. There were several times that the Dark Lord delegated

punishments to Bella, something with which she was very adept. I spent quite a bit of time under the Cruciatus Curse delivered by her. I just wish that I could watch when she is delivered to Madam Bones."

"That will be a while," said Moody. "She is to be a 'guest' here for some time. She has a lot to answer for. Now, shall we get to work?"

Snape took several hairs from Bella as Moody questioned her. The potions master then went up the ladder and down the other ladder to the compartment where Umbridge was residing. He put the hairs in a flask, shook it, and instructed Umbridge to take a sip. A moment later, there was a copy of Bellatrix standing there. He placed her under a mild compulsion spell and had her follow him up the ladder and then down into the other compartment. Once there, Moody took a moment from questioning Bella to place Umbridge under the Imperius. He then had her watch Bella so that she would learn Bella's mannerisms and speech patterns. Moody hit the jackpot when he found out that Bella and Voldemort were lovers. Even as the men were trying to wrap their minds around that concept, Moody got an evil on his face.

When Bella had answered all that Moody wanted, Snape administered the antidote to her, then they watched as she became aware of her surroundings. When she saw her double, she screamed in rage, fought her bonds, and cursed Snape for a traitor. Moody smiled, then stunned her. Moody had Umbridge exchange clothes with Bella, then gave Umbridge her instructions, led her up the ladder, and sent her out the floo back to Gringotts.

"Do you think that she will survive through tomorrow?" asked Snape.

"Do you really care?" Moody shot back.

"Not really, I was just wondering if I could get odds from Potter betting on her probable life span."

"Hmm.... Anything over a couple of hours would probably be a

sucker bet."

"You're probably right. I just wish that I could be a fly on the wall when the Dark Lord finds out how seriously he has been had."

"Interesting though how the Dark Mark appeared on Umbridge when she polyjuiced Bella. Do you think that it is a working Mark or just a visual copy?"

"It should be a working one, polyjuice completely copies everything about the person. That is why Crouch lost a leg and an eye when he polyjuiced you a couple of years ago."

"Don't remind me. That was the most embarrassing time of my life, the way that mutt caught me off guard."

Snape sneered. "Constant Vigilance, my shiny red arse. I just have a lot of fun rubbing your nose in it."

"I'll tell you what. You forget about that and I'll forget the whole Death Eater thing."

Snape was stunned. Moody must really be embarrassed if he was going to forego reminding Severus of his past. He decided to get the promise in a tangible form. Raising his wand, he intoned, "I, Severus Snape, hereby swear on my magic that if Alastor Moody swears to not bring up my past, I will never again mention his kidnapping."

Moody nodded as the magic took hold. "One last time just for old times sake....."DEATHEATER!"

"SUCKER!!!"

Moody grinned. "I, Alastor Moody hereby swear on my magic to never again remind Severus Snape of his criminal past."

As the binding oaths took effect, Severus held out his hand. "Fresh start?"

Moody took the hand. "Works for me. By the way, you need to speak with Miss Granger. She has some news for you."

"Will do. Anything else?"

"That should be it. I'll call if anything new comes to light." With that, Snape went over to the fireplace and went home.

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Voldemort's Hideout

Somewhere in Wales

Bella/Umbridge apparated to the outer edges of the wards, gave the password supplied by Bellatrix, then took another quick sip from the flask as the wards recognized the Dark Mark on her arm. It was fortunate that Voldemort had trusted Bella to be his secret keeper, figuring that she would die before giving the secret to any hostile force. His trust was well placed, but the combination of the stunner and the Veritaserum got past her defenses. She had let her guard slip in the supposedly friendly environs of Gringotts, a mistake that she would never again have the opportunity to either make or correct.

Entering the manor, she walked into the throne room, bowed in front of Voldemort and kissed the hem of his robe. Voldemort took his wand, tapped her on the head and instructed her to rise.

"Did the exchange go smoothly?"

"The exchange did Master, however it took longer to get back than planned. I had to dodge some Aurors. It meant apparating all over

half of Britain to throw them off the trail."

"You've done well, Bella. Would you like to torture some muggles as a reward?"

"Actually Master," she said, licking her lips. "I can think of something else that would be a much better reward."

Voldemort gave a rare smile. "I believe that I can take time out of my busy schedule to reward my favorite servant. Go in the bedroom and get ready. I will tell the guard that we are not to be disturbed. That and take my energy potion." He quickly gave the guard the instruction and went in his private bathroom. Reaching up into the medicine cabinet, Voldemort pulled down a muggle prescription bottle and shook out two blue pills. Popping them down, he gave a quick peek at his watch. "Fifteen minutes to Paradise!"

Meanwhile, Bella/Umbridge slipped into the bedroom and, as per the instructions given by Moody, placed the goblin monitoring charm in the corner of the room, giving it an excellent view of the bed. She then took off her clothes and slipped into a red and black teddy with fishnet stockings and stiletto heels. She was posed with a riding crop when Voldemort came in the room. He gave her an appreciative look and transfigured his robes into a muggle school uniform. Bella sneered.

"It looks like Tommy has been a bad, bad boy. Mistress Bellatrix is going to have to punish you..."

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Almost an hour later the pair was relaxing in the throes of post coital bliss, with Bella's head on Voldemort's arm. He lit a cigarette and made a half turn to hand it to Bellatrix. It was the Dark Lord's misfortune that the polyjuice chose that moment to wear off. The finely chiseled features of Bellatrix Lestrange began to morph into

a....toad?! Delores Umbridge turned toward him, pursed her lips, and reached for the cigarette.

"AARRRRGGGGHH!!!!!"

Voldemort got an eyeful of the person with whom he was sharing his bed and promptly panicked. He rolled off the bed, clawing at his eyes while simultaneously throwing up. The throwing up did not damage him, the clawing did, effectively blinding him. The screams of pain brought his guards running into the room to protect their Master. The scene that greeted them was a naked Voldemort rolling on the floor while an equally naked Delores Umbridge was trying to stop him from hurting himself while yelling, "Baby! What's wrong? Please give your love kitten your mark!" The guards did the only thing that made sense. They turned their wands on themselves and shouted "Avada Kedavra!"

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Gringotts Bank

Flickaxe's Office

Warcry sat watching the newly installed (by Delores Umbridge) monitor in Voldemort's quarters. He did not have any problem watching Umbridge emerge from the body of Bella, probably because most humans looked quite a bit alike in his eyes. In fact, Umbridge seemed a bit more attractive to him after she changed, less human, so to speak. He snickered, watched until all of the parties left the room, then took the memories and bottled them. These would not go to Flickaxe, they were to be delivered to Lord Potter-Black for his viewing enjoyment. When he finished, he firecalled Moody and delivered the bottled memory.

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Ministry of Magic

Two weeks later

The members of the press were beginning to get antsy. They had been called to cover a special session of the Wizengamot called by Lord Potter Black and Lord Longbottom. The purpose of the meeting had not been stated in advance, but there were rumors that it had something to do with Bellatrix Lestrangle, or as she was now known, Bellatrix NoName. The press gallery watched as the members filed in, then the bailiff stepped forward.

"Oyez, oyez! This special session of the Wizengamot is called by Lords Potter-Black and Longbottom! The purpose of this meeting is the public shaming and punishment of the criminal once known as Bellatrix Black-Lestrangle! Lord Potter-Black, Lord Longbottom, you may bring forth the prisoner!"

There was a gasp as Harry and Neville stepped onto the floor of the courtroom with Bellatrix bound between them. They walked her over to the chair and deposited her into it. The chains of the chair wrapped themselves around her. The two Lords stepped back and Harry addressed the prisoner.

"Bellatrix, you have shamed the family with your criminal actions. You escaped Azkaban Prison where you were serving a deserved sentence for your crimes. Since that time, you have continued your terrorist activities, murdering and torturing innocent people, both magical and muggle without a single shred of common decency. I have dissolved your marriage to your fellow criminal, Rudolphus Lestrangle and have banished you from the Black Family. I have also declared you anathema. Do you have anything to say for yourself before I carry out your punishment?"

"Ooh! Is the little pretend Lord going to send big, bad Bellatrix back to Azkaban?" Bella's face hardened and she sneered at Harry and

Neville. "My Master will bring me back, just like he did before! And then I will finish what I started!" She looked pointedly at Neville when she said that. His face hardened and he returned her sneer.

"I don't believe so," said Harry. "Before I carry out the Family punishment, the government must be satisfied in their claims. You escaped from Azkaban, the automatic punishment for that crime is the Dementor's Kiss." He clapped his hands. "Dementor! Fulfill your duty!"

The room grew cold and Bellatrix saw the Dementor gliding toward her. For the first time in years, she was absolutely sane. And in this flash of sanity, she knew fear. During her time in Azkaban she did not fear the Dementors, she enjoyed their company, that is once she went insane. Now however, she saw not just death, but also damnation. In the seconds before the Dementor gripped her head and lowered its face to hers, she screamed, a heartrending scream filled with terror. That was quickly cut off as the Dementor removed her soul. Once the foul creature glided out of the courtroom, Harry cast a cutting curse at Bella's empty shell of a body, removing her head from her body. There was a wet thunk sound as the head hit the ground. Harry amplified his voice and announced, "Family honor has been satisfied." He and Neville turned as one and left the courtroom. Once out of view, Neville stopped Harry and put his hands on Harry's shoulders, looking him in the eyes.

"Thanks mate. Maybe now the nightmares will stop. The House of Longbottom owes a debt of honor to you for avenging my parents." The two young men hugged.

"Neville, if this can stop your nightmares, it was worth it. I just wish that it would stop mine. At least now Sirius is also avenged. I still have a long way to go to get rid of my demons."

"Harry, if it helps, I will be with you all the way on that journey." The two made their way out of the Ministry while the press photographers

were still snapping their gory pictures for the next edition.

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Voldemort's Hideout, Wales

Delores Umbridge admired her shiny new Dark Mark as she took the copy of The Daily Prophet from the lowly Death Eater recruit. Since she had come out from under the Imperius Curse placed on her by Moody, she had found a new mission in life. She was the person caring for the Dark Lord, changing the bandages on his eyes and nursing him back to health. Once she had gotten past that problem of the disappearing gold, she showed great imagination in disciplining Voldemort's rank and file Death Eaters while he was out of action. It was still touch and go as to whether or not Voldemort would be able to see, but she had a back up plan in the event that conventional treatment failed. She had apparated to Diagon Alley under a glamour and purchased a set of artificial eyes similar to the one worn by Mad-Eye Moody. She was keeping them a secret in the event that they were needed. She thought that it was strange that the only eyes the optometrist had in stock were emerald green but in retrospect she thought that the colour was eerily fitting.

Looking at the front page of the paper, she saw the photos of Bellatrix being kissed, then beheaded. She smiled in silent joy knowing that her competition for the affections of the Dark Lord had been dealt with by that Potter brat. It would not do for her to be vocal about her satisfaction, rather sympathize with her Master when he heard the news. This should enrage him to the point that he would tear Potter limb from limb when he healed. It was really too bad that Voldemort was a half blood. He was strong, but once he disposed of Potter and his little friends, he would be disposable. Tucking the paper under her arm, she walked into Voldemort's room. She put on her best sickly sweet voice.

"Master, I have some tragic news....."

Chapter 23

Meeting of the Minds

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Office of the Headmistress

It was an eclectic group that met in Minerva McGonagall's office. There was, of course, McGonagall, but there was also Harry, Hermione, Tashimoto, Flitwick, and Ron. They were representing the school. From the DMLE, there were Madam Bones, Alastor Moody, and Tonks. Flickaxe and Warcry were there from Gringotts, but in an unofficial capacity. Gringotts would have been highly upset had they known of the real reason for their presence. Rounding out the group were Dobby, Arthur Weasley, and Severus Snape.

Once the entire group had been assembled, Harry called for their attention. "I must show you something, however this must be kept secret." He then got Moody's attention, gesturing slightly at the walls, then scratching his ear. The old Auror got the message. 'The walls have ears.' He continued, "I must ask everyone here for an oath not to reveal what I am about to show you." The wizards, at the urging of Moody, complied, and swore on their magic to remain silent.

"Why don't the others have to take the oath?" Hermione asked.

"Dobby is already bound to secrecy, and since this is a Wizard's Oath, it wouldn't be binding anyway. Besides, the goblins have a greater reason than just losing their magic to comply with my request for secrecy. Now that that is out of the way, please follow me." He then led them out of the office toward the second floor girl's bathroom. The students, Snape, and Dobby knew where he was going, but Ron decided to have a bit of fun.

"Gee, Harry. I didn't know you swung that way." This had the effect of

lightening the mood slightly.

Entering the restroom, Harry went over to the sink. Just then, Myrtle stuck her head over the toilet partition, saw the group, and gave a frightened squeak as she dove back in the toilet and down the pipes. Hissing, "Open!" in Parseltongue, Harry opened up the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

"What the...." Madam Bones started.

"Everything will be explained shortly," Harry said as he led them down the stairs that had been installed by the Hogwarts elves. When they reached the bottom, Harry pointed his wand back that way they came and hissed, "Close!" He then pointed his wand at the sconces to light them and led the way into the Chamber proper. He had them take seats at the conference table, then began.

"I would like to start with Ms. Granger. Hermione?"

"Thank you. I was asked by Harry to research the Dark Mark, with an eye toward its origin, power, and the possibility of removing it. With Pro... excuse me, Mr. Snape's assistance, I found out quite a few things."

"The spell used to place the Mark on a person not only binds them to Voldemort, " some people still winced at the name. "but also acts as a channel that Riddle can use to drain the magic and life force from his subjects should he need it. That is why, when he was disembodied so many years ago, marked followers seemed to have a slight drop in their magic at times. My hypothesis is that he was leeching from them necessary power to keep himself active. He would have stayed alive without it, but would have been in a completely dormant state. The magic in the mark is such that, even should the arm where the mark is placed be lost, such as an amputation, the properties of the Mark would remain. You may equate it to a tapeworm. Unless you get it all, it cannot be removed."

"The origins of the Mark come from the binding spell used to enslave house elves." At this, there was quite a stir, with Madam Bones breaking into a rare smile. "That's right, house elves. I would think that the purebloods who support him would have nightmares knowing that Riddle turned them into oversized house elves."

"Is nothing wrong with being a house elf," Dobby stated, slightly offended. "We is more powerful than wizards anyway! I would think Mr. Malfoy should have been glad to be likened to a house elf." This had the effect of giving most of the wizards a severe case of the giggles at the mental image of the late Lucius Malfoy in a tea cozy.

"I never said there was anything wrong with it. Your people have a proud heritage, I was just making a point." Hermione conjured an easel with a cut open drawing of the human anatomy. "As you can see, the Mark has two tendrils of magic stretching from the mark location to points in the body. Since the life force is in the blood, one tendril stretches from the Mark to the aorta, the largest artery in the body. The other ties in to the pre-frontal cortex of the brain, that part which make you what you are. My research shows that while the tendril controlling the life force actually goes through the wall of the aorta in order to make contact with the blood, the one that draws magic just lays on the surface of the brain and doesn't penetrate. In order to remove the Mark, it will take a team of four people, two for each tendril."

"Just how would that work?" asked McGonagall, fascinated.

"You would have to have one person on each team drawing the tendrils free while the other person encapsulates the ends in a covering so that they cannot re-extend and leech back in. As soon as the one in the aorta is withdrawn, the person who is working on the withdrawal will need to stop and close up the hole in the artery to keep the person from bleeding to death internally. A simple healing spell will do that. Once the encapsulation and withdrawal from the

organs is complete, the Mark can be lifted completely from the body." Hermione then moved the first drawing off the easel to reveal a board covered with a complicated arithmancy formula. "The biggest problem with lifting the Mark from the body is that the spell will have to be done in Parseltongue..... in reverse."

At that, everyone looked at Harry. "And just how am I supposed to do that?" he asked.

"What you will have to do is speak the spell forward, I can record it, then it can be played backwards and re-recorded. You would then study that recording until you perfected it. Remember also that much of magic is in the intent. You will have to concentrate on the intent while you are doing the spell. Once the mark is off the body and the tendrils out, you can either place it in a container for evidence or banish it."

"The other thing that I discovered was that the exterior look of the Mark can be duplicated, along with the summoning spell, without the parasitical effect. That is the end of my report, I believe that the floor goes to Flickaxe."

The goblin spoke up. "This ties in with what Ms. Granger reported on the duplication of the Mark. Working without official sanction, I have been able to plant surveillance devices inside the Dark Lord's residence." There was a gasp from Bones and a look of admiration from Moody. "Right now, he is in a bit of a weakened state. Some of your students played a prank on him which caused him to lose his eyesight. I don't know if it is permanent or temporary, but right now, Delores Umbridge has taken the place of Bellatrix Lestrange and is dealing one on one with the Death Eaters in his stead."

McGonagall snorted. "If she is as incompetent with him as she was here, Riddle should be out of business in a week."

"As a Death Eater, she seems to be a lot more competent than in her

other jobs. She has actually come up with a viable alternative should her master not regain his sight naturally. Mr. Moody gave her the idea."

"The damned eye," muttered Mad Eye.

"Yes, she has obtained a pair of implantable magic eyes for Riddle, but has not let him know about it. The shopkeeper, however, had a sense of humour and told her that the only color he had was green, the same color as Lord Potter-Black's eyes. He apparently figured out who they might be for, it seems that the Death Eater who purchased them inadvertently showed his Mark." This brought a groan from Harry about fan girls copying him.

"The idea that young Mr. Weasley came up with should put a dent in his ability to communicate with his troops through Umbridge. I will turn the floor over to him."

"Thanks. What Harry and I came up with was to have Tonks use her ability to impersonate one of his new recruits. Umbridge doesn't know all of them anyway. Tonks could have the imitation Mark put on, then infiltrate and tell Umbridge that she has captured Harry. That would bring Umbridge running so that she could bring Harry to Snake face and get the credit. She is good about stealing other's glory for her own means. She could then be re-arrested so Voldie would not have her close support."

"Auror Tonks, would you be willing to do that, go in the snake's den, so to speak?" Madam Bones asked the young Metamorphmagus.

"If it will help bring this war to a close quicker, then yes. I have lost too many people close to me, just like everyone else here." Harry walked over and gave her a quick hug.

"I think that it will help," he told her.

"Then I will give it my blessing," said Director Bones. "I am wondering what this 'prank' was that was played on Mr. Riddle that caused the loss of his eyesight."

For some reason, all of the students and the goblins broke out laughing. "This was rich," said Harry. "I can show it to you, but you must understand that it does not have a 'family friendly' rating. You should also have a very strong stomach. The only reason that I won't show it is that some people could get in big trouble with the Ministry. I would have to have an oath that anyone involved would not be prosecuted. The other thing is that I want legislation similar to that which was passed during the last war to be enacted."

"And what legislation would that be, young man?" asked Bones.

"Simple, we are in a war, not some kind of schoolyard dust up. In war, people get killed. Right now, the only ones killing are the Death Eaters. The rest of the populace are passive targets. When you stun a Death Eater, one of his compatriots will just revive him. That happened several times in the DoM. I want those of us fighting this war to have all of the tools to take the battle to the enemy. That includes the Unforgivables and even Muggle weapons if necessary. A society at peace can afford to put away violence, but we are not at peace. We have an enemy who has no restrictions or consciences when it comes to killing or torture of not only combatants, but also innocents. The Muggles know this better than we do. They have wars where kids fight, led by adults who fought when they were kids. These kids have to kill, but when the war is over, they lay down their weapons and go live normal lives. Sure, they will probably have nightmares, killing is a terrible thing, but they do it not out of hatred, but out of a sense of duty."

"Most of you do not know it, but there was a prophecy made before I was born. It says that I must either kill Voldemort or he must kill me. One must die at the hands of the other, neither can live while the other survives. That seems pretty plain to me. Now Hermione doesn't

believe in Divination, but that does not matter because Voldemort believes the prophesy, at least the part he heard. I am sure that he has figured out the part he didn't hear. That stupid prophesy is the reason my parents are dead, the reason that he has not left me alone since I was eleven years old. It is the reason that every Death Eater wants to be the one to capture me for their Master."

"I have faced the fact that I have to kill Voldemort. And I will, by whatever means necessary, but I will not go to prison for doing it, no matter what means I use to do it. I also will not allow anyone else who kills in defense of other innocents to suffer. Either the law will change or wizarding Britain will fall."

"And just how do you plan to carry out that threat, Mr. Potter?" Bones asked coldly. "I have gone along with you so far, but these kinds of demands are ridiculous."

"Simple, the goblins have decided to support me in this war. Not the Ministry, they despise the Ministry. Should this legislation not pass, all assets belonging to those who fight it will be frozen and moved out of the country. I want to ask Mr. Weasley something. Arthur, would you support me in this effort to bring down Voldemort, no matter what the means?"

Arthur Weasley showed then why he was a Gryffindor. "To the death, Harry."

"Fine. Now for the big surprise. There are two heirs of the Founders in this very room, and both of them support this." Harry called under his breath, "Fawkes!" The phoenix flashed into the room, holding the Sorting Hat.

"Arthur, please put your hand into the Hat and withdraw what you feel in there." Arthur did so, and brought forth the Sword of Gryffindor. The sword blazed brightly and Arthur was encased in a golden glow. He suddenly did not appear to be the henpecked, muggle focused

husband of Molly Weasley, but rather a warrior. The room was stilled in shock. Madam Bones cleared her throat.

"And who is the second Heir?"

"Me," Harry replied. "I am the Heir of Hufflepuff. It was confirmed by Gringotts last week." Harry walked over to a cabinet that the elves had brought into the Chamber, reached in and withdrew two items. The first was an amulet which he placed on the table, the second was a golden cup with a stylized badger on the front. "This amulet," he said, "Can only be worn by the heir, no one else can even touch it." Hermione attempted to pick it up, but it seemed there was some sort of field around it that would not allow her hand to come within six inches of the object. The others also tried, with the same results. Harry picked it up and placed it around his neck.

"The cup was what held the potion, along with some wine, that weakened Salazar Slytherin to the point that Godric Gryffindor was able to banish him from Britain when Slytherin attempted to overthrow Hogwarts. Lady Helga has always been underestimated, she was more Slytherin than Slytherin. It was she and Godric who banished Slytherin, Lady Ravenclaw had been mortally wounded by that time, although she was the one to come up with the plan. Dumbledore had hidden Arthur and my heritages, it was only by accident that I found out about it. Voldemort is the Heir of Slytherin, Arthur is Godric's heir, I am Helga's. Ravenclaw died childless, her Heir is whoever holds the position of Head of Hogwarts. That would be Headmistress McGonagall now. Albus never found out about that, a prior Headmaster took that secret to the grave. It was only through the Goblin's research that we discovered it. It was a good thing that the knowledge had been lost, at one time, Umbridge could have claimed it."

"In that case," said McGonagall, "There are three of the Founder's heirs supporting Lord Potter-Black."

Harry led McGonagall over to the cabinet from which he had retrieved the objects belonging to Hufflepuff. "I was not able to touch this, being that I am not Ravenclaw's Heir, the goblins, as the safe-keepers for the estate had to place this in here." He opened the door to the cabinet, McGonagall reached in and withdrew a staff. When her hand made contact with the artifact, she had a similar glow as Arthur.

Ron was still trying to take in the fact that his father was Heir to Gryffindor. "Mate, how were you able to use the Sword in second year?"

"The Sword determined that I had a Gryffindor attitude. I am also related to the Gryffindor line through my mother, albeit distantly. Remember when Albus was tried? He had kidnapped my mother and aunt when their family died. She was related to both the Prewitts and Weasleys. It worked, but no better than any other sword would have. It is only the true Heir who can use it to its potential. Since Godric set his inheritance rules up to favor the youngest son, that means that you are the Heir apparent after your dad."

Bones was floored. The Founders had reserved seats in the Wizengamot which had never been claimed. "You three will need to claim your seats in the Assembly. With the power of three heirs, you should be able to pass just about whatever you need. Lord Potter-Black, that will give you three votes, and Arthur and Minerva will each have one, although those votes will, by the very fact of ownership, be very influential. I don't believe that there will be any worries about having to win the war by whatever means necessary. I will speak in favor of your bill. The hard part will be convincing those fossils in the Wizengamot that you are who you say."

Harry grinned. "That will not be a problem, once we declare, their magic will do the convincing. The Goblins have tested and certified me, they will do the same for the others. Every wizard who has gone through Hogwarts will have to acknowledge the Heir of their house.

Jonathon Dumbledore, not being a Hogwarts student, is exempt, and the Slytherins will still recognize other Founder's heir, even if not the specific Founder. Since there are three Founder's heirs, and none of us claim to be Slytherin's Heir, it will even be obvious to them that we are who we say."

"I just wonder why this was never in 'Hogwarts, a History'" griped Hermione.

"Simple, Hermione," said Harry. "Everyone has their secret, it is not up to anyone who can pick up a book to discover them. Otherwise, they are not secrets. That is one of the reasons I had everyone swear an oath before they came down here. I want the three of us to claim our seats next week so that we can get the legislation through. Meanwhile, we need to begin work on the other things. Hermione, I need you, Professors Tashimoto and Flitwick, along with Professor McGonagall to work with Severus to remove the Mark. I will start on that spell formula. Arthur, you and Ron need to work on strategy to end this war. Don't leave anything out. If I need to use a sniper rifle or drop a damned bomb on Voldemort, don't discount it because it might be a muggle thing. What we need is as little collateral damage as possible. Flickaxe, you and Warcry need to identify Voldemort's lackeys in the Ministry. If you have to call in hit teams to get rid of them, no problem. I am, as of now, posting a 10,000 galleon reward for the removal of all Ministry Death Eaters. That is dead or alive. If you can set them up for arrest, fine, just make sure that you have the evidence. Only marked Death Eaters can be collected on however. If they are just sympathizers, try to get enough evidence to force them out. Tonks, Hermione and Severus can put the phony Mark on you; once they do, it will be up to you and Amelia to infiltrate you into the DE ranks. Any question?"

Hearing none, Harry led them back up the stairs and into Hogwarts proper.

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Voldemort's Hideout

Two Death Eaters were in the process of being tortured by Umbridge. They had failed in their assignment of trying to recruit some foreign students to their ranks. Umbridge released the curse after about three minutes, then berated them and sent them on their way to try again. After leaving the throne room, one turned to the other.

"How do I get out of this chicken outfit?"

"You don't," the other grimaced. "Just be glad that she doesn't have much talent. Compared to the Dark Lord and Bellatrix, that Crucio was like being tickled."

Meanwhile, Umbridge went into Voldemort's room, fed him dinner and changed his bandages. "It should just be another week before we know how bad the damage is, My Lord."

"Excellent, please kneel before me."

"Yes, my Lord." Umbridge knelt, but not directly in front.

"Crucio!"

Umbridge screamed until Voldemort released the curse. "Now, finish the assignment I gave you and find out how to get me Potter!"

"Y-yes my Lord." She backed out of the room, snickering to herself. The filthy half blood had missed with his curse.

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I'm going to stop this one here since I am not usually one for 10,000 word chapters. Coming up we will have the Heirs claim their seats, lots of fluff and some down and dirty fighting. As always, I covet your

reviews....they let me know how I am doing.

Hamilton

Chapter 24

The Heirs

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The same day

After the strategy group left the Chamber of Secrets, Harry took Ron aside. "Mate, now that your father will be recognized as Heir to Gryffindor, and you as the Heir Apparent, would you feel better if you moved into the Noble's dorm area?"

"Harry, the last thing I want to do right now is hurt your feelings, but we need to talk about a few things. Knowing that the walls have ears.... Yeah, I saw that motion you made to Mad-Eye, can we go someplace where the ears have been plugged?"

"Sure, my room is safe." Harry led Ron down to the Noble's dorm, whispered the password, then had him follow to his room. "Now, what's up?"

"Harry, for the past five and a half years, you have been my best mate, not that I have been deserving of that title for some of it. Many times I have been jealous of you because everything seemed to come so easily to you. Youngest seeker in over a hundred years, money, fame, influence... yes, I know that the fame is not only because of something your mother did, that you can't even remember, and that the money is, for the most part, blood money, you still would have been raised a world apart from us, and I know now that you would have given it all up to have the people you love back. I was still jealous; that and insecure."

"You see Harry, From day one, I have been the side kick. Not that I don't appreciate you being my friend, but being the youngest out of six brothers, all of them excelling in their own way, the only claim to

fame that I had was that I was Harry Potter's friend. I was a slightly smarter, skinnier, and better looking Crabbe or Goyle. For years three of the closest friends were the poor pureblood, the wealthy half blood, and the middle class muggleborn. You have to admit, in this world, that is a strange combination. I still love you like a brother, and I still love 'Mione like another sister, but since you have come into your own, we have all moved on with our lives."

"Ron, I never meant to slight you and Hermione....." he stopped when Ron waved that away.

"I know you didn't, and believe it or not, I'm not jealous, at least not anymore. But the fact remains that we aren't as close anymore. Your closest friends and allies for the past few months are a bunch of wealthy pureblood nobles. Now I find out today that I am a member of that group, but when it is all said and done, I'm still Ron Weasley, the youngest son of Arthur Weasley, a great guy who happens to be one of the few honest guys working at the Ministry. Where you can spend whatever you want and never have to work a day on anything other than breeding kids to take up your titles and money when you pass away, I have always known that I would have to go out into the world and make a name for myself, and not just ride your coattails to success. Now I don't know what the Gryffindor vault has in it as far as money, maybe a lot, maybe not, but I recognize that being the Heir or Heir Apparent is more than just money, it is a sacred trust. The vault has been inactive for generations because of the terms of inheritance being hidden, so it could be that interest has been pouring in, but maybe not. I know that Dad will treat it as a trust, and I will do the same thing. Whatever is in there is not ours, anymore than the Crown Jewels belong to the Queen of England. It is there for our use, but it is also our responsibility to be good stewards of the vault."

Harry looked at his friend with a new respect. "You have grown up; I just don't see what that has to do with staying or moving into a different dorm."

"Simple, I may now be a 'Noble', for whatever that is worth, and I may, through an inheritance be rich, but still not like you guys. Now maybe in fifty years or so when I am sitting in one of the Founder's seats in the Wizengamot, maybe I will feel differently then, but for now I am still just Ron Weasley, not Lord Gryffindor. My closest friends right now, the guys who I have been spending most of my time with, are Seamus and Dean, a half blood and a muggleborn."

"Harry, everyone in the wizarding world who can read a newspaper, knows that you are courting Daphne Greengrass and Jennifer Dumbledore... Don't give me that look, you should know that celebrities have no privacy, you three have been all over the society pages, thanks to Colin Creevey's camera. But did you have any idea that 'Mione and I have been dating other people?" At Harry's stunned look, he continued. "I have been dating Pavarti and Hermione has been dating Terry Boot. And we're happy. I don't need to be a side kick anymore, and 'Mione has found someone who is her intellectual equal."

"I think that I can speak for Hermione when I say that we are still your friends, but we also have our own lives. And remember..." He took Harry in a headlock and gave him a noogie, "We are still family. I plan to stay in my regular dorm and be a regular guy. Besides, I still think that Malfoy is a sneaky git, and Crabbe and Goyle are walking adverts for birth control and marrying outside the family."

"Well, what can I say to that? Ron, I am glad that you are my friend and family, and I respect your decision. Now, tell me all about you and Pavarti....."

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Return of the Founder's Heirs!

Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, and Ravenclaw Made Known!

Exclusive to the Daily Prophet

Staff Writer Miranda Kelewles

The Wizengamot came to a standstill yesterday when the Heirs of three of the Founders went public and claimed their seats in the Wizengamot. Arthur Weasley, the Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts, claimed his seat as Heir of Gryffindor, Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts, claimed the Ravenclaw seat linked to her office, and Lord Harry Potter-Black claimed the seat reserved for Hufflepuff. A representative of Gringotts, Account Manager Flickaxe, affirmed the validity of the claims.

The first order of business that the Heirs put forward was the nomination of Amos Diggory, father of the late Cedric Diggory, Hogwarts Tri Wizard Co-Champion murdered by Peter Pettigrew at Tom Riddle's return, as the new Minister of Magic. Mr. Diggory has worked for several years in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, and has a sterling reputation as a voice for the Light in both this, and the first Voldemort war. Lord Gryffindor's nomination of Mr. Diggory was seconded by Lady Marchbanks, Minister Pro Tempore. The election of Mr. Diggory was passed by acclamation.

The new Minister then introduced a bill which would give not only Aurors, but also every magical citizen, the absolute right to use any force, including deadly force, in the defense of one's self or the defense of other innocents. The bill was passed by a narrow margin following much heated debate.

"There will be blood running in the streets, I tell you! If any citizen can use the Killing Curse or other such means to settle their differences, people will be dropping dead all around us!" claimed longtime Wizengamot member Stanford Wooley.

This claim was countered by Lady Ravenclaw. Fixing that stern gaze

that Hogwarts students over the past four decades have experienced, Lady Ravenclaw said, "Right now blood is running in the street, innocent blood. Aurors cannot protect everyone, there are not enough Aurors, and even they have had their hands tied. When a government disarms its citizenry, they are telling the citizens that they do not trust them and that they fear their own citizens. Every witch and wizard is armed with a deadly weapon, their wand. Right now, the forces of evil are using those weapons to slaughter innocents. If the criminals are stunned, their accomplices reenervate them so they can continue their killing, Azkaban has had a revolving door for Death Eaters, with Voldemort reclaiming his minions and recruiting more from the common criminals. To keep doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results, is the definition of insanity."

This view was supported by Lord Potter-Black-Hufflepuff. "Had the entire wizarding world stood up against every wannabe Dark Lord dictator over the years instead of counting on either the government or some 'Chosen One' to do their dirty work for them, there would be no Dark Lord problem. A people who is unable to protect themselves are little better than sheep. American Muggles have that right of self defense in most of their areas, a burglar or rapist tends to have second thoughts when he thinks that he might be killed or badly injured carrying out his crime."

The final vote on the bill was close, passing by a very small margin, with old alliances shattered. A secondary bill allowing all magical people to use muggle weapons including something called a 'firearm' or 'fireleg', passed by the same margin. This bill would allow squibs and muggle members of muggleborn families to carry and use these muggle 'firearms' or 'firelegs' without fear of reprisal from either magical or muggle authorities in defense of their families. The Muggle Prime Minister in a statement, opposed the bill, but was told that should a protected person be prosecuted, the magical government would Obliviate any witnesses or muggle law enforcement as needed. He then grudgingly informed the Wizengamot that his office would refer all cases of deadly force use

by protected peoples to the DMLE.

The self styled Lord Voldemort, Tom Riddle, who claims to be Heir of Slytherin, was asked in an owl interview if he would be attempting to claim the reserved seat for the Slytherin Heir in the Wizengamot. The owl sent to Riddle with the questionnaire was returned, without comment, plucked and roasted, with a hint of garlic and basil. Knowing Riddle's half blood heritage, it is doubtful that he would be able to claim the seat in the pureblood Wizengamot, even should he prove to be Slytherin's Heir.

For more on Lord Gryffindor, turn to B-2

For more on Lady Ravenclaw, turn to B-3

For more on Lord Potter-Black-Hufflepuff, turn to B-4

For more on Amos Diggory, turn to B-5

For comments on the new laws, turn to the op-ed page, A-16

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Noble's Dorm Common Room

Harry had just returned from a grueling Transfiguration exam when he was braced by both Daphne and Jennifer on the way into the common room. They each grabbed an arm, led him over to a sofa, and pushed him down. Daphne glared at the others in the room.

"Out," she ordered. Malfoy, Nott, and Avery, knowing her temper, were tempted to try to stick around anyway, it seemed like the high and mighty Potter was about to get a dressing down, and they would have given anything to see Hurricane Daphne in action, as long as

she wasn't aiming at them. However, since she had ordered them out, they were not planning to incur her wrath by disobeying. Besides, Draco had a couple of pairs of Extendable Ears, courtesy of the twins, and they could at least listen in from the other side of the door. They scrambled out of their seats and left through the boy's dorm door.

"Dobby!" called Jennifer. The excited little elf popped in.

"What can Dobby be doing for Mr. Harry Potter's Dumbleydore?"

She gave him a tickle on the ear, something that she found the little elf very fond of, and asked, "Can you disable the Goblin monitors here?" Dobby nodded enthusiastically and made the hand motions to do so.

"Can Dobby be bringing you anything else? Some tea, maybe some biscuits?"

"That sounds good, just wait about fifteen minutes before you come back." Dobby smiled and popped out. Harry snickered.

"You have him wrapped around your little finger."

"No, I have just taken the time to really get to know him, and I don't take him for granted. Which, by the way, Loverboy, is the reason that you are here with the three stooges listening on the other side of the door. Daphne?"

Daphne pointed her wand at the bottom of the Boy's dorm door and sent a spell unfamiliar to Harry at the two cords sticking out from under the door. There was a flash of white light, and two pained yelps from Draco and Nott, while laughter was heard from Avery. The fried Extendable Ears were quickly withdrawn, then Jennifer put up a silencing spell. Daphne started out.

"The whole wizarding world knows that you are courting us, but we

have seen no evidence of it. You spend more time with Draco than you do either of us, and when you do deign to grace either of us with your presence, it is nothing but either political maneuverings in my case, or studying with Jennifer. You had a strategy session with a whole bunch of people the other day, and I never found out that the Founder's Heirs, of which you are one, returned until you announced yourselves in the Wizengamot. That is embarrassing! Do you not trust us enough to let us into your life?"

"No, it's not like that!"

"Then just what is it?" Jennifer picked up the quaffle.

"I don't want to put you in any danger!" Harry immediately saw that this was not going to work. He was right.

"Then you truly are an idiot. We are in danger every day by refusing to let Riddle take over our lives. He knows about us, Jennifer's Great uncle is the only wizard he ever feared, and my father died under mysterious circumstance while taking the others and me to be marked. I also cut off his access to my vault. Even if I was not one of your girlfriends, I am still bound to you as an ally! Don't you think that it is time that you treated me like one?"

"I never meant it like that!" Harry was sweating, he really had no good excuse for the casual way that he was treating the girls.

"Then how did you mean it? Did you once stop to think that we could be something other than your future trophy brood mares? Maybe that we have brains and feelings of our own, that we could possibly contribute something which might keep your skinny, but still strangely attractive arse alive? My family has dealt with the Dark Lord for over forty years, Jennifer comes from a family of schemers that would put Salazar Slytherin to shame. Do you somehow think that we were raised in some sort of bubble and didn't pick up anything along the way?"

He looked up at the two girls in amazement. "I have no excuse; I have wronged both of you. I have been a prat, an idiot, a fool....."

"Keep going, you're doing good," said Daphne. Jennifer nodded in agreement. "Just to let you know, both of us are in agreement on this. You need to step back for a bit from this war, I don't mean that you should neglect your duties, far from it. But you need to become human for a while. You have, from what I gather, responsible people doing different jobs. Let them do the job and quit trying to micromanage them. Bounce some ideas off of us, you never know, you might just be too close to the situation; it might help to get a different view."

"You're right; so how do I correct these terrible errors in judgment?"

"Simple," said Jennifer. She pulled a galleon out of her robe. She flipped it up in the air. Daphne called it.

"Heads, damn it, it's tails. Okay sister, you get to go first." Jennifer smiled and hopped on the sofa, putting her arms around Harry's neck.

"We start out with a good snog session. You bargained with Jonathon for the right to court me, but have never even kissed me. I need to find out how good you are. Can't be marrying someone who has lips like a piece of calves liver, can I?" She lowered her head to kiss him. "Hmmm, definitely not liver."

"Save some for me, sis."

"You had some already," Jennifer pouted.

"But it has been quite a while, I seem to have forgotten."

At that point, Dobby popped back in with the tea and biscuits. He

took in the sight leaned forward to whisper at Jennifer. "Scratch his ear, he should like it."

All three of the lovers broke out in laughter. As Dobby poured the tea, he muttered, "Well, Dobby like it." Jennifer sat back on the sofa, then gave Dobby a hug, scratching his ear. The little elf turned red, grinned, then bowed and popped out.

Daphne sat down on the other side of Harry and pulled him over to her to kiss him, while Jennifer cast a warming spell on the tea to maintain the temperature. After a good half hour of three way snogging, Harry was dazed. The girls let him go, then picked up their tea cups.

"So where do we go from here?" he asked.

"You get to take us on a date, a real one, not some insipid session at Madam Puddifoot's or drinks at the Three Broomsticks. Dinner, dancing, the whole works," said Daphne. "We need to show Riddle that we are not going to allow our lives to be ruled by fear. But first, we are going into your room to talk and really get to know each other. You tell us what you are doing, if you need an oath of secrecy, we will give it. We are going to be equal partners in your life, you might as well get used to it now."

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Voldemort's Hideout

"There you go, Master. The bandages are off; can you see anything?" Dolores Umbridge held her breath.

"I can see, but it is very fuzzy and out of focus."

"Well, we can wait and see if it clears up, if not, we may have to either get you some glasses or contacts. We can kidnap an eye

healer to make you some glasses at night if you like."

"And look like that fool Potter? If it comes to that, I will remove my eyes and have the magical ones put in. Let me see the ones that you got."

Umbridge brought out a case with the implantable eyes. Voldemort brought one of them close and peered at it.

"GREEN!?!!" he raged. "CRUCIO!" This time, he did not miss.

A moment later, he lifted the curse. "Round up every marked Death Eater. We are going to leave the country for a while. With this new law about self defense, we need to recruit more people or we will be wiped out in no time. Let the fools start killing each other while we are gone, they will repeal the law and we will come back stronger than ever."

"Yes Master, where will we be going?"

"I think that Spain might be nice this time of year, so we will go to Albania instead. I don't want to recruit soft, useless troops, I want people who are hardened by adversity. And by the way, Dolores...."

"Yes, Master?"

"CRUCIO! That's for the time I missed and you pretended to be hit. Fake screams just don't sound the same."

Chapter 25

Harry and Helga

Gringotts Bank

Vault 4

Warcry was performing a very important duty today, he was opening up a Founder's vault for the first time in over 300 years. There was a small delegation from the Board of Directors there with him and Lord Potter-Black to witness this momentous occasion. Accompanying his client were the Lord's two betrothed, important witches in their own rights. Lord Potter-Black, or as he would now be known to the Goblin Nation, Lord Hufflepuff, heartily enjoyed the ride down to the vaults, asking Warcry to increase the speed of the tram. This did not please the two Ladies, but since Hufflepuff was so much more important than they were, it was tough luck for them and full speed ahead. It was so nice to be able to make someone that important so happy, but he would bet that the young Lord was going to pay dearly for that ride in the very near future. He smirked.

"Lord Hufflepuff," he said, holding out a silver ritual knife, "Please cut the palm of your hand and place it on this yellow square. If the magic recognizes you, the vault door will open."

"What happens if it doesn't recognize me?"

"There should be no problem with that, but in the unlikely event that should happen, you will be sucked through the door, and everyone else will go home with an interesting story to tell at the supper table. If you please..." Warcry motioned to the door while the Directors gave sly glances at each other; either way they would have an interesting story. The betting at the moment was running 60-40 odds against Potter-Black making the return trip to the surface. Harry gulped and took the knife, took a deep breath, sliced his palm and

placed it on the square. There was a heart stopping moment while the square glowed, analyzing Harry's blood and magic, then a series of 'clanks' could be heard coming from the door. There was a groan, and the door swung open to reveal an almost empty room with a portrait on a stand facing an old, but comfortable looking couch. The witch in the portrait opened her eyes, looked around, and spotted Harry.

"Well, aren't you planning on coming in? You did pass the test after all." Harry went in and gave a bow in front of the portrait.

"Lady Hufflepuff I presume?"

"No, I'm Morgana. Lady Hufflepuff is three vaults to the right." Seeing Harry's shocked look, she grinned. "Got ya! Of course I'm Helga, but I've been waiting 300 years to pull that one over on somebody. Now for the important question, why did I have to wait 300 years? I assume that you had a father, a grandfather even? In fact, a lot of your ancestors could have qualified. And while we are at it, what is your name?"

"My apologies, my name is Harry Potter; as to why you have been waiting so long, apparently one of your heirs died without an actual heir, so your line went to a cadet branch with the new Hufflepuff not being told of their heritage., Your lineage was lost, with only the person responsible for their death knowing the secret. That person and their family hid the knowledge for a long time. I only found out by accident."

"Interesting, but before we can make this really official, I need to know more about you. I assume that Goddy's old hat is still sorting at Hogwarts?" At Harry's nod, she continued. "Open that box sitting in front of my portrait. In it you will find my tiara. It has the same charms as Godric's hat, but will also allow me to communicate directly in your mind. You do need some privacy for this after all."

Harry opened up the box to find a tiara laying on a black velvet cushion. Feeling somewhat ridiculous, he took it out and placed it on his head. He could hear Daphne and Jennifer giggling in the background and at least one goblin snickering. He vowed to get even with the girls later.

"Get even, eh? Sounds a bit Slytherin to me. And I see that you were sorted into Gryffindor. Loyalty to those who deserve it, good, good. But lazy, not good. At least not good for a 'Puff. Moderately intelligent, but certainly no Ravenclaw. All in all, I still think that you might bring honor to my line, especially if you can get rid of that lazy streak." Hufflepuff dug farther, then gave a disappointed sigh. "No more House system? And it was your idea? Oh, in that case, I really can't blame you, in fact, with putting all personalities in all dorms, you are actually making the entire school Hufflepuffs! Well done! You know, Salazar, for all his reputation as a schemer, was really not that bright when it comes right down to it. If he had, he would have never gone three to one against us and gotten himself thrown out. I assume that you know the real story about that?"

"If you are talking about how you drugged him so Gryffindor could finish him off, then yes. It gave me a whole new outlook on history. It showed me that history really is written by the victors."

"Of course it is; now, go out and bring in your young ladies, it is time for some family business." Harry took off the tiara and placed it back in the box. He then went out and took the girls aside.

"She wants to talk to the three of us together." He led them in the vault and once they had entered, a clear shield slid down the front of the vault, silencing their conversation from the waiting goblins. The portrait instructed the girls, one at a time, to try on the tiara. There were silent conversations between Helga and the girls, then after Daphne had placed the tiara back in the box, a small box appeared next to the box holding the tiara. Helga directed Harry to open the box, inside were three rings, two small and one large.

"Now, you put a ring on each of your girlfriends and they are to put the larger one on you. The two smaller rings are tied to your ring, they will allow you to see what is really in this vault. There you go, that's right." The portrait gave a satisfied smirk as Harry and the girls eyes widened with wonder. There was no longer an empty vault, it had money stacked around all of the walls, there were chests with jewelry, books and a series of trunks from different eras. "If all three of you are seeing it, then everything is all right. I couldn't have just anyone knowing what was in here, not even the goblins have any idea what is here, other than interest on the money they have paid in over the years. The only ones who can see the true contents are the Heir and his or her immediate family."

"But we are not immediate family," Daphne said, confused.

"Oh, I must have forgotten to mention that small item. When you wore the tiara, I made sure that you were compatible and serious about your relationship. Then when I had you put on the rings, it effectively married the three of you together. Welcome to the family, girls."

"WHAT!?" The three were stunned, but Helga just smiled and winked at them.

"You can't say you weren't warned that I was sneakier than Salazar. Now, you three go on home and make me a whole bunch of new 'Puffs. Go on. And Harry...."

"What?" Harry was almost afraid to hear what was going to come next.

"Take them out somewhere nice to celebrate your honeymoons." With that, Helga shooed them over to the door, the shield disappearing. When they had stepped outside, the door closed and locked firmly behind them.

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"Well, that was unique," Harry said wryly as they got out of the cart on the main floor.

"You don't say," drawled Daphne. "Not only do you keep getting into outrageous situations, but now you have dragged us with you. So now we're married, but which one of us is Lady Hufflepuff, Jennifer or me?"

"Actually, you both are," said Flickaxe, hurrying up to catch this last question. "Notification just hit my desk while you were on the way up; I hurried to congratulate you on your nuptials." The goblin had a satisfied smirk on his face, mainly due to the fact that he had just become, by default, the account manager for the Hufflepuff vault as well as Harry's other vaults. There was a good possibility that he could pick up the Greengrass account also, after all, the present manager had allowed Voldemort to tap into it through Daphne's father. "I went ahead and filed the paperwork with the Ministry."

"Oh no, you mean that it's legal for a portrait to marry people?" Daphne asked, clearly unhappy.

"The portrait didn't marry you, it just facilitated you in marrying each other," Flickaxe said. "The details are a bit fuzzy, but you three are not the first ones to be married in that vault. I have read of at least three other occasions that it has happened. It's strange, before Lord Hufflepuff claimed the vault, I knew nothing about the history of the vault or contents, but once it made me account manager, I suddenly knew everything I needed to know about it. That is some powerful magic."

"What can you tell us about these rings?" asked Jennifer.

Flickaxe thought a moment. "Hmm... they were created by Lady

Helga to make sure that she would have an heir. Once on, they stay on until death, then revert back to the vault. They are spelled to ensure that the wearers of the set remain loyal to each other and, in your case, where there are three of you, remove any possibility of jealousy. They are also designed so that you will become completely comfortable with your mate, ensuring a happy love life. Oh, and they of course have a fertility charm on them that will last at least until two children are born of the union."

"Makes sense," Daphne muttered. "An Heir and a spare. She really was a sneaky old broad." This was said with some admiration. "The big problem I have with this whole thing is that I had planned to have a large formal wedding to celebrate the joining of our two families."

"Me too," said Jennifer. "Mum is going to go spare when she hears about this. She has been planning my wedding since I got out of nappies. I don't think she will be very happy if I show up for it preggers or tell her 'never mind, sorry you missed the wedding'"

"See, that is the great thing about being a guy," said Harry. "Wedding plans just sort of take care of themselves. All the guy has to do is show up at the right time, reasonably sober, and it's all good." He ducked as both of his brides threw punches at him. "What did I say?" he asked with mock injury.

"Were you born with that foot in your mouth, or did you have to learn how to put it there?" asked Daphne. Turning to Jennifer, she said, "We need to talk. We can bring your mum into it and have her speed up the wedding plans, and I will speak with my mother and have her do the same. I doubt that we can keep this under wraps, but I suppose we can minimize the damage. Let's get back to the school and start sending owls out. Do you want to flip for who goes first?"

"We'll work that out later. What do we do about Mr. Clueless here? I mean, we are married as Hufflepuffs." Harry got a hopeful (and somewhat lecherous) look on his face.

"Simple. We may be 'married', but he is still sleeping by himself until the weddings. I'll be damned if I am going to wear a maternity wedding dress." Harry's face fell.

"You tell 'em sister. That doesn't mean we can't tease him to death between now and the ceremonies though." Jennifer smiled seductively and 'accidentally' gave Harry a slight brush with her hand just south of his waist. Flickaxe just grinned and shook his head. He hoped for Lord Hufflepuff's sake that the weddings would not be too far in the future.

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Dumbledore Manor

"This is outrageous!"

Jennifer had just broken the news of her surprise marriage to her mother; Violet's reaction was understandably negative. Her little girl, the lynchpin of the family's plan to join the Dumbledore fortune to the Potter estate, was threatening to run off the rails. The rings Helga Hufflepuff had tricked onto Jennifer's finger would ensure that Jennifer could never be manipulated into betraying Potter and getting him out of the way. The other problem was the clock, at least the biological one. The first girl to give birth would bear the Heir of Hufflepuff, a much better option than just hooking into the Potter fortune. She absolutely could not stand it if Daphne's child became the Heir, especially if Jennifer gave birth to a female child. The inheritance rules simply would not allow it.

"Oh, don't start Mother!" At Violet's disbelieving look, Jennifer continued. "I know that everything you and Jon have been doing this year has had the aim of putting Harry and I together, and not for any benevolent means. I'm not stupid, and I'm not as naïve as you think."

Not denying it, Violet shot back, "Then why did you go along with it, Daughter? I haven't heard any objections from you."

"That is because I wanted to get together with Harry. He is a nice, sweet guy, and has never done a thing to us, no matter what yours and Grandfather's delusions are telling you." She stopped when Violet slapped her.

"How dare you! That bastard almost ruined this family by framing Uncle Albus!"

"Don't give me that. Albus built his own coffin and dug his own grave. For Merlin's sake, he testified under Veritaserum, even if he did try to stack the deck. Even Jon knows the truth, even if he won't contradict you. I also know what you have planned with your little maneuvers, and it won't work. I saw a pensieve memory from Harry when he did the negotiations and I know all about Jon's little problem, and why he won't produce an heir. So now you have a choice; you can either back off and let us work this out, or I will divorce myself from this family and leave you hanging out to dry. Jonathon can put aside his discomfort and produce his own heir, or the family can die out. I don't have to worry, I am already Lady Hufflepuff." She turned to leave, then stopped, turned around and said with a sickly sweet voice, "Mother?"

When Violet snapped her head up, Jennifer hauled off and slapped her mother's face hard enough to snap her head back. "Never lift your hand to me again or I will hex you to the point that you will think that house elves have blessed lives. Now, I will take care of my own wedding, be happy if you are even invited."

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Greengrass Manor

A very different scene was taking place at the Greengrass home.

While Daphne's mother was a bit disappointed, she was alternately thrilled that her little girl had made such a good match. Her focus was to help her daughter put on the wedding of the century.

"This is so exciting! Lady Hufflepuff; my daughter is now in a Founder's family! Come here baby." She drew Daphne into a hug. "And such a nice boy! I wonder if he and your co-wife would like to have a joint ceremony? I mean, the magic has made you co-equal, you should lay aside your competitive nature for your and your husband's sake."

"Mother, are you sure that you were a Slytherin? I mean, I have no problem with it, but I thought you would go through the roof."

"In any other circumstances, I might have, but the magic overrides all of that pettiness. And remember, Slytherin means ambition; what better result could you have than a successful marriage with two such wonderful people? Money, power, fame and love? You have done the family proud and I believe that you will remove the stain that your father left on our name. He may have been declared innocent and possibly even a hero, but you and I both know he was a very disturbed man who kissed the robes of that mutant master of his. I don't know what happened that night, but I thank Fate every night that I didn't lose my daughter's soul along with my husband's. The wizarding world may have been told that your father was innocent, but they will always wonder. You are the new generation, you have a sacred duty to make the best of it."

"Mummy, why haven't we ever talked like this before? Not that I don't agree, but it is not what I have been raised to believe about you."

"Honey, your father was such a dominating presence I never felt comfortable mentioning anything. I was literally sold to the Greengrass family, I was the third daughter of a pureblood family, not wealthy, and with no noble background. I was however, beautiful, and was considered good marriage material. With the Greengrass

name came wealth and respectability, even a nice Ministry position for my father. The best thing to come out of the marriage however, was you. Now, go on back to school and talk with Jennifer and find out what you girls want to do about the ceremony. I will even work with that insufferable mother of hers to make you girl's special day the best that the wizarding world has ever seen."

Another hug later and Daphne was on her way back to Hogwarts.

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Noble's Dorm

Soon after their arrivals back at school, the girls had worked out a mutually agreeable arrangement in regards to their upcoming nuptials. Violet Dumbledore was to be cut completely out of the loop and Martha Greengrass would handle all of the arrangements. The girls would wear identical gowns, and the wedding would be held in Westminster Abbey under a special arrangement with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Minister of Magic jointly performing the ceremony. During the wedding and the week leading up to it, the historic structure would be 'closed for maintenance'.

The Queen, who was very aware of the magical world, would be there, as well as the muggle Prime Minister. The Queen came from a long line of magically aware monarchs going back all the way to Arthur. Her namesake, Queen Elizabeth I was the last registered magical in the royal family, but they were, by nature, very secretive and could have had other Royal wizards and witches, privately educated. It would explain a lot about Britain's survival in a hostile world. As independent as the Ministry of Magic pretended to be, they were still subjects of the monarchy, as were all magical beings in Britain.

Everything was going swimmingly until time for bed; when Harry and the girls headed for their separate rooms, each of their doors opened into one large, joint bedroom, with one large bed. It seemed that the castle recognized the married state of the three and decided to do some friendly meddling. This suited Harry just fine, but alas, his fantasies were not to be realized this night. Daphne, after a few futile attempts to eject Harry from the room, conjured a cot and the two girls ordered him into it while they took over the bed. Harry was threatened with a full body bind should he attempt to join them. This did not stop the girls from performing a slight bit of torture, giving him glimpses of future pleasures while changing into their nightclothes. Daphne and Jennifer crawled into bed, snuggling up together while Harry weighed the risks of disobeying his present and future brides. Two of the three people in the room slept soundly that night; neither of them were males.

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Somewhere in Belgium

Lord Voldemort, the Dark Lord, He Who's Name Must Be Hyphenated, while on his way to the new Albanian command centre, suddenly got a very uneasy feeling and a splitting headache.

Chapter 26

A Different Threat

A/N: For informational purposes, this chapter begins where Chapter 2 of "The Mudblood Revolution" leaves off. In order to get the context correct, please go read that first if you haven't already.

A/N2: This is a repost to edit out all of the italics... if you have already read this chapter, I'm sorry, but you will have to wait a few more days for an update.

Hamilton

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Office of the Headmistress

Harry had just left the Room of Requirements following a meeting with Hermione Granger, a rather spirited meeting regarding Muggleborn rights. Hermione had presented him with a document titled "The Mudblood Manifesto", the contents of which could threaten to turn wizarding society on its head. He shook his head at his friend's new found crusade, but he had promised to support her, it was the right thing to do. He now stood in front of the Gargoyle in front of the Headmistress' office. He racked his brain trying to think of the password, then gave up and addressed the statue.

"Stony, move aside, I, Lord Hufflepuff, have business with Lady Ravenclaw." Surprisingly enough, the gargoyle jumped aside and bowed. Harry snorted. "I guess rank really does have its privileges," and went on up the stairs. Reaching Minerva's office, he knocked on the door.

"Enter."

"Lady Ravenclaw." This was a signal to let Minerva know that this discussion would be addressing matters under the purview of her title, that of Founder's Heir and Wizengamot member.

"Lord Hufflepuff, is this to be a school matter or legislative item?" Minerva picked up on the nuance of the formal title and returned the serve.

"A bit of both, actually. I assume that you have gotten some feedback from parents of muggleborn students recently?"

"That must be the understatement of the year. To date, I have received one hundred-thirty howlers, twenty two notices from the parents of first years telling me that they were planning to return their children to the muggle education system, and over fifty notices from parents who want me to send transcripts of their children's grades to magical schools in other countries. I assume that is the sort of feedback to which you are referring?" she stated somewhat sourly.

"Just so," Harry said. "This is a situation that has gotten completely out of control and must be addressed or there will be no British magical community in a few years. I plan to introduce some reforms in the Wizengamot in the near future and I need your assistance."

"What sort of reforms?" Minerva asked.

"It has to do with this document. I had to take an oath not to reveal secrets, but this will be distributed in a few days anyway, and will allow us to frame the reform legislation around their demands." Harry handed Minerva his copy of the 'Mudblood Manifesto', which she took and read through. When she was finished, she handed it to Harry and sat back heavily.

"I see nothing in here that is not common sense and common decency. The problem with British Wizarding society is that few of the people in power have that good of a grasp of either. There is also the

problem that few wizards apply logic to anything, it is against their mindset. It will play well to much of society, unfortunately, those people hold no power and the people who do hold power will not give it up willingly. I will support the reforms and will call Arthur to get his support. Please contact Miss Granger and Mr. Finch-Fletchley and ask them to meet us here so that they can help us draft this legislation. Since they seem to be at the forefront of this uprising, they can help with the needed work."

"Very well. Now, on a personal note; I would like to deliver this wedding invitation to you and ask you to perform the bonding ceremony."

"Harry, I am honored that you would ask, and I most certainly will. What day will the ceremony be held?"

"I know it is kind of sudden, but it will be Saturday after next. School will be out for the Christmas holidays, that will give us time to have some sort of honeymoon before returning to school."

"Wonderful! Have you decided where you are going for the honeymoon?"

"I found out from the goblins that Sirius owned an island off the coast of Belize." At Minerva's questioning look, he explained. "Belize is a small country in Central America south of Mexico on the east side facing the Gulf of Mexico. It is quite the exotic spot, popular with both magical and muggles. You can buy citizenship there simply by putting fifty thousand U.S. dollars into one of their banks. I took the liberty of having Gringotts open up accounts for my wives and myself so we will be traveling by muggle means as citizens of Belize. This should throw off any unfriendly parties that might be paying attention to my comings and going."

"Have either of your brides ever flown on a muggle aero plane; it could be quite a shock to them."

"Ah, the proper term is airplane, and no they haven't. Neither have I for all that matters, we will all three have a new experience ahead of us. I am also hoping to do a little sports fishing if I have the time. There is a possibility that we may be a few days late for the start of term."

"That will not be a problem, but if we cannot head off the parents from pulling their children from school, we may not have a new term. I suppose we could go with a smaller staff, but even if we keep their whole tuition, we would not be able to reopen next year with that small of a student body."

"It all comes back to that," Harry grimaced. "I will attempt to drum up support with the other nobles in the dorm, but I believe that we will have some problems right out of the gate. I can't see Theo or Avery siding with me on the creation of a House of Commons, and even Draco and my bride, Daphne will probably kick. For right now, I'll send for Hermione and Justin. Say seven pm?"

"That should work, until then." Minerva gave a small nod which could only be interpreted as a dismissal.

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Kukes, Albania

Just outside this town nestled in the junction between the North Albanian Alps and the Korab Mountains, the self styled 'Lord' Voldemort, He-Who's-Name-Must-Be-Hyphenated, aka Moldishorts or Dork Lord, Tom Marvolo Riddle, had placed his Eastern Command Centre. He had chosen this area for the following reasons: It was mountainous and remote, and there was no discernable wizarding population to stumble across he and his followers while they scouted throughout Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia for new pureblood recruits. New recruits would then be taken by portkey to the Albanian

Headquarters for their branding and orientation. They would also have a language translation spell placed upon them which would enable them to communicate with their master and fellow Death Eaters.

The placement of his headquarters in a wizard free zone would have serious consequences for Voldemort; he thought he could overcome any problems with the local muggle population should his camp be discovered. Voldemort thought that muggles were so far beneath him that he had not taken any time to research his neighbors. The local population was made up of roughly 98 percent devout Muslims who were battle hardened from fighting alongside their co-religionists in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, then recently in the former Yugoslavian areas of Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosevo during a period when the Serbian 'christians' were using ethnic cleansing to rid their little patch of Earth of anyone who believed that God was named Allah and that his messenger was Mohammed. In other words, these folks were not people who could be bullied.

On this fine winter morning, a earnest young man named Khalid was wandering in the forest in search of a measure of enlightenment. He was not seeking some momentous religious insight, but rather how he could approach his father to convince him to open negotiations with the father of a beautiful young lady named Fatima. It would not be proper to approach her himself, it could ruin her reputation should she be seen with a young male not related to her. He was also unable, living under his father's roof, to approach Fatima's father on his own. Should he convince his father, her beauty would bring a high bride price. As far as he knew, there were no preexisting marriage agreements in place.

As the first son of a well respected arms merchant, Khalid had spent his youth accompanying arms shipments to his Muslim brothers in places where they had to fight for their very existence. He had spent the last year helping smuggle Muslim refugees from the war zone in Serbia to the Muslim held Bosnian Republic and to his own country

of Albania. Fatima and her father were two of those refugees he smuggled out under the noses of the Serbian border guards and over the mountains into Kukes. The last set of infidel guards he had killed with his own hands, slicing their throats and taking their weapons and ammunition. Those were sent out in the next shipment, poetic justice, the weapons of the infidels used to protect Muslims.

He was musing in this vein when he happened to look up and see, in the sky beyond the first ridge, an abomination; a mark in the sky of a skull and a snake.

"What could this be?" he thought. "Have the infidels attacked us and sent up some unholy form of fireworks to boast of their victory?" He went into smuggler mode and quietly made his way to the area. Crouching behind a tree facing a clearing, he saw something that made his blood run cold. There were a group of people in black robes with death masks covering their faces. The only one whose face was bared appeared to be some sort of daemon, a unholy cross between a human and a frog. He strained his ears to hear the daemon addressing the humans. He was unsurprised to hear her speaking English, the language of the Great Satan, one he had learned from a mujahdeen fighter who had extensive contact with infidel CIA agents in Afghanistan.

"And that is the proper way to announce the Dark Lord's victories; the incantation is Morsmorde, and the wand movements are as such," the daemon said, waving a stick. Khalid was not sure what this 'wand' thing was, but he was sure it was not good. He watched as the humans set off the sky mark, when they did it incorrectly, they were tortured by the daemon throwing a red light out of her stick into the offending human. Khalid should have never been able to see any of this; there should have been muggle repelling and notice-me-not wards in place. Unfortunately for Voldemort, he had entrusted the placement of the wards to one Delores Jane Umbridge, a low powered witch whose only real talent was the causing of pain through dark curses. She was the figure that Khalid had mistaken for

a daemon. She spoke again to the group of recruits.

"You are approaching a momentous time in the service of the Dark Lord. Tonight he will receive your oaths and place his mark of service upon you. Until then, go eat and prepare yourselves for your noble commitment."

Khalid crouched lower to make sure he was invisible to these creatures. This 'Dark Lord' could only be Shaitan himself, the one called Iblis, once an angel named Azazel who rebelled against Allah. Who else could command a daemon such as the one he saw? He remained frozen in place until the infidels left and the daemon disappeared with a loud POP, probably to return to Jahannam, or Hell, to report to its master. All thoughts of the beautiful Fatima fled his mind and his inner warrior came forth. It would not matter if he became a martyr, this abomination so close to his home could not be allowed to stand. He made his way out of the forest and ran home to tell the local council.

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Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Noble's Dorm

Harry had returned to his dorm, hoping to get some quality time with his brides. All of the arrangements for the wedding ceremony were complete, and the girls should have been eager for some serious down time. This was not to be however, when he entered the common room, they latched onto him and led him to their quarters where a table had been set up with three chairs, a pile of parchment, and sharpened quills. He groaned, thinking that somehow details from the wedding had been forgotten. As if reading his mind, Jennifer shook her head.

"No Harry, this has nothing to do with the wedding, it is about ours,

and your, future." Seeing his quizzical look, she continued. "Daphne and I really began to look at your time here as well as your time before Hogwarts. This raises a question for which we have no answer. Why is Snake Face so damned hot to kill you?"

Harry was stymied; he knew why Voldemort wanted him dead but he had not told anyone since that fateful night in Dumbledore's office. He wasn't sure that he believed in the prophecy, his feelings were that it was just part of Dumbledore's machinations. The problem was that Voldemort believed the prophecy, or at least the part he had heard. Either way, it didn't explain why Voldemort had not died when his killing curse backfired all those years ago. Maybe his wives could look at this situation from a fresh point of view and come up with an answer.

"Okay, it all starts back before I was born. Albus was at his brother's pub in a private room interviewing an applicant for the Divination position. This person had an ancestor who supposedly had the inner eye. After listening to her prattle on, according to him, he had pretty much come to the conclusion she was a fraud. She demeanor suddenly changed and she appeared to be possessed. She began speaking in a different voice."

"This is the so-called prophecy she delivered: 'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...'"

"Unfortunately, one of Voldemort's followers heard part of the prophecy before he was caught by Aberforth and removed from the area. He hotfooted it to Voldemort and told him. There were two children born at the end of July, Neville Longbottom and myself. Instead of going for Neville, he considered me more of a threat. He

killed my father, then my mother, and attempted to kill me before his curse backfired. I have actually relived that night when the Dementors affected me in my third year."

Daphne got a strange on her face. "Tell me exactly what happened when you saw the scene."

"My dad jumped up and told my mum: 'He's here, Lily! Take Harry and run!' I can only guess that Voldemort blocked the floo and put up wards so she couldn't portkey or apparate out. She ran up to my room carrying me; I saw a green flash come from downstairs. Voldemort came up the stairs and told my mum to get out of the way; he wasn't there for her. She begged him to spare me and take her, she had placed herself between him and me. He sent the killing curse at her and she fell. I seem to remember some sort of glow, I don't know that I saw it as much as felt it. Voldemort then sent the killing curse at me and it rebounded, separating him from his body. That is where the vision ends."

"Let me think about this for a bit." She called Dobby and asked for tea and biscuits, then she and Jennifer began to talk softly between themselves. Harry got up and began to breathe deeply, reliving the nightmare all over again. After a while, Jennifer motioned him back over and she and Daphne each took one of his hands.

"Harry, as much as I hate to say it," Daphne began, "we have come to the conclusion that the prophesy is true. As far as the seer, well even a stopped clock is right twice a day. What seems to be the clincher is the part that says: 'And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives'. See, when he was disembodied, you didn't have anything to do with it. Your mother somehow invoked blood magic to protect you from him. That is why he wasn't able to stand your touch when he was possessing Quirrell. Again, you took no offensive action. I believe if you have somehow been able to hit Quirrell by some means with which Voldemort was unfamiliar, he would have died then. Instead, it was your mother's

magic that kept either of you from killing the other. If you can figure out this 'power the Dark Lord knows not', you could finally be free from all this."

"But," interjected Jennifer, "you will have to be the one to do it; it will have to be up close and personal. Have you felt him in your scar at all recently?"

Harry thought. "No, I haven't. I never really noticed it, I have been so busy, but the pain has always been sort of an irritating background, unless he was close. Since I'm not feeling him, I wonder if he is even in the country anymore."

"He probably isn't," said Daphne. "There have not been any reports of Death Eater activity, it's a good possibility that he went somewhere to lick his wounds and regroup. He has lost about all of his inner circle; it only makes sense that he would be lying low. Since you are getting nothing through your scar, he has probably put quite a bit of distance between you. Have you tried to peek in on him?"

"Absolutely not! I have been following the philosophy of 'live and let live'. This new information though tells me that it is not going to be enough. He will never let me alone, and I have no idea how to take him out. I'm starting to wonder if us getting married will make you two targets for him."

"Don't even start with that; I have been targets since I refused to be branded as one of his cattle. Jennifer would be a target since she is a Dumbledore, the same as her brother. Together we are strong, alone we are just targets to be picked off. I believe that the first thing you need to do is start working on your Occlumency and start learning Legilimency. If you can be proactive and look in on him, maybe you can get an idea of what he is up to and screw up his plans."

"Snape tried to teach me Occlumency, the only thing it did was open me up for his attacks and a false image that ended up getting Sirius

killed."

"That should not have happened. Tell me, how did he try to teach you?"

"All he did was tell me to 'clear my mind', then went in on a full scale attack. I was only able to throw him out once, and it never helped with the visions."

"No wonder; that is not how you teach Occlumency. The first thing is that you must have a teacher you trust. I assume that you didn't trust Snape to start with?" At Harry's assent, she continued. "The next part is to show you how to clear your mind, usually through meditation. Once you have that down, you start to organize your thoughts through means such as sorting them into a mental library, making a mental building with different memories in different rooms with different levels of security. It sounds like he was purposely opening up your mind to the Dark Lord."

"How do you know so much about it?"

"I was warned before I ever came to Hogwarts that Snape and Dumbledore regularly scanned us; I began to learn Occlumency at about age eight. By the time I came here, nobody could use Legilimency successfully on me. I could shuffle them into a room where there were unimportant memories that I didn't mind them seeing. Once you begin to organize your thoughts, you can feel anyone who tries to get in; it feels like a tickle in the front of your mind."

Harry got a grim look. "I'm not sure why Severus did what he did, but I am going to find out. In the meantime, could you help me learn? I trust you to do it more than anyone else."

Daphne leaned over and gave him a kiss. "Okay handsome. Let's start right away, that way when you talk to Severus you will have the

basics down so you can at least tell if he is scanning you. Now, the first part is to get comfortable...."

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Kukes, Albania

Khalid had made his report to the local council; it had not been received well. He had actually been accused of being drunk on alcoholic spirits and either hallucinating or making the whole thing up. Due to his trustworthy service to date though, they decided to give him the benefit of the doubt, and every able bodied male warrior were now following him through the woods to the clearing where he had seen the daemon and its followers. At this moment, they were spread in a semi circle, hidden in the trees around the clearing. No more than five minutes after they got settled in their ambush sites, a group of people wearing robes and death masks filed into the clearing and also made a semicircle with their backs to the townsmen. There was a feeling of anticipation when all at once, there was a pair of POPS and the frog looking daemon appeared with another figure. The townsmen froze, their blood chilling in their bodies. With the glowing red eyes, the snake-like face with slits for a nose, along with the large snake he was carrying over his shoulders; this must surely be Shaitan himself! Thirty fingers tightened on thirty triggers as they watched in fear.

"Voldemort strode up and motioned the new Death Eaters forward. One at a time they bowed in front of him and fell over in pain as he raped their minds looking for any sign of disloyalty. As he released each one from the mind rape, he would take his wand and place the Dark Mark on the recruit's arm. Suddenly the snake made an urgent hissing sound and Voldemort froze.

"Nagini tells me that we have some company in the trees. We should not be poor hosts, our visitors should be invited into our little meeting." He raised his wand and Khalid, understanding the English,

opened fire. This was the signal for each and every one of the townsmen to follow suit. Before Voldemort could put up any sort of blocking ward, every one of his new Death Eaters had fallen in a hail of 7.62 mm bullets fired from that most reliable combat rifle ever made, the Russian made AK47. The Council chief, a grizzled old man who absolutely hated snakes, had emptied his magazine into Nagini, tearing her to shreds. Voldemort and Umbridge took a couple of non-life threatening hits before Voldemort was able to throw up a shield around them.

Figuring that fighting numerous unknown assailants who had just wiped out his new recruits would be sheer suicide, he grabbed Umbridge's arm and apparated both of them out of the clearing and into their headquarters building. Calling out for his remaining Death Eaters, he instructed them to take portkeys and vacate the area, that he would meet up with them in Paris. Since there were some of his DEs still in Serbia and Macedonia, he decided that he would portkey to Serbia and call his wayward followers from there. They would all go to Paris and regroup; he would then decide where to go from there.

Meanwhile, back at the clearing, the townsmen made sure all of the robed villains were dead, then beheaded them to make sure that Shaitan could not bring back their corpses to attack their homes. Khalid was being mobbed by well wishers, congratulating him and praising him as a true defender of the faith. Due to his actions, they had driven off Shaitan himself, as well as one of his daemons, with no casualties to the town's defenders. The high point of all of this came when, back at his father's house, there came a knock on the door. Upon opening it, Fatima's father asked for Khalid's father. He was there to offer his daughter in marriage to the new young hero. In less than a year, the happy couple would be expecting a child and Khalid would be the newest member of the town Council.

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Due to the distance between Voldemort and Harry, when Voldemort raged over this last setback while getting bullets picked out of his scaly hide, Harry felt not even a twinge of pain in his scar.

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A/N: I would like to thank Pwn Master Paladin for his great analysis of how to explain Voldemort's seeming immortality without using Horcruxes. I used his explanation in the scene between Harry and the girls.

Chapter 27

The Mudblood Revolution

Chapter 4

Merlin's Oath, Part I

Ministry of Magic

Office of the Minister

Amos Diggory gave a predatory smile as he affixed his seal of office to the documents before him. He then gathered them up and handed them to his assistant, one Percy Weasley.

"Weasley, I expect these to be copied and sent out to every person in Magical Britain by tomorrow morning, is that clear?"

Percy gave a sigh of defeat. He had attempted to talk the Minister out of this rash action, but had been curtly dismissed. "Yes sir, but I hope that you are prepared for the firestorm this will unleash."

"Never mind that, now Amelia," Diggory said to the other person in the office, "I want you to take a squad of Aurors and go to Hogwarts to arrest as many of the traitors on this list as possible. Once the leaders are in custody, this so-called revolution will fall apart."

"Amos, this action is not only insane, it is illegal. If you expect me to carry out this bit of foolishness, you are mistaken. You have become as out of control as Fudge ever was and I expect that you will come to the same end."

"That's too bad; since you will not follow orders, then I will get someone else to. As of this moment, you are sacked and your pension is withdrawn. You have one hour to leave the building, after

that, I will add your name to the arrest warrant."

"Very well, but I will be watching when you are run out of office just like Fudge." Amelia stormed from the office to collect her belongings. Percy left at the same time, then took her aside once they were out of listening range.

"Madam Bones, I believe that I can delay this a bit, but you and I need to get to Hogwarts before Amos can get together his squad to make these arrests. If you grab your personal items out of your office, we can leave from there."

"What do you expect that going to Hogwarts will accomplish?"

"Well for one, the people in the warrant should have a heads up, I believe that Minerva would probably shut down the Floo access, making Amos take extra time bringing his people in from Hogsmeade. The other thing is that I don't believe that Harry Potter will allow this to stand, there are measures he can take to protect the people there. I will need to run and get my dad so he can come with us."

"Then by all means, do so. It looks like we have just joined the revolution, whether or not we wanted. Godspeed, I will meet you in my office in fifteen minutes."

Percy ran off as if his life depended on it, it actually did. Within the next hour or so, he would be losing his job and proclaimed a traitor to the magical world, at least if this didn't work out. Arriving at his father's office, he barged through the door.

"Percy, this is a surprise," Arthur began.

"Dad, no time for pleasantries, this is an emergency, we need to get to Hogwarts."

Arthur paled. "Has something happened to Ginny or Ron?"

"No, I'll explain when we get there. Let's go!" Arthur decided to trust Percy on this, jumped up from his desk, and followed his son to the DMLE office, meeting Amelia with two minutes to spare from the fifteen allotted. Amelia took some Floo powder, threw it in the fireplace, and called out, "Hogwarts Head Office!" and disappeared in the flames. Percy and Arthur followed suit.

When they had stepped out into McGonagall's office, Percy took the Headmistress aside and gave her a quick rundown on the situation. Shocked, Minerva blocked the Floo access for all but voice communications, then using the Sonorus charm, called for all students to gather in the Great Hall. She then sent an unfamiliar charm toward the fireplace.

"What was that, Minerva?" asked Arthur.

"Just an idea I got from one of our muggleborn students." At Arthur's quizzical look, she continued. "You know about that muggle invention they use to speak with one another over long distances?"

"You mean the felleytone?"

"Yes, that's it. They have another device they hook to it called an 'answer machine', or something like that. Anyway, when the muggle is not at home, this machine tells whoever is calling that the person is not home, and allows the caller to leave a message. I had Professor Vector help me write the charm, unfortunately it does not allow any message other than my original. Come along Arthur, we need to get to the Great Hall"

As they were leaving the office, the fireplace flared and the Minister's head became visible. "Minerva, take the block off, I need to come through!"

"You have reached the fireplace of Headmistress Minerva

McGonagall at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I'm not at my desk right now or otherwise unavailable. If this is important, please send an owl post or try back later. I am sorry to have missed you, goodbye." With that, the fireplace broke the connection. Arthur laughed, having seen the look on Amos' face.

"I have got to get that charm from you."

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Great Hall

About an hour after Percy, Arthur, and Amelia came into Hogwarts, the doors to the Great Hall banged open and Amos Diggory, accompanied by a squad of Aurors came marching in. They found their way blocked by Harry, Arthur, and Minerva. Behind them, wands drawn, stood the rest of the members of the Noble's Dorm and Ron Weasley.

"What may I help you with today, Minister?" asked Minerva.

"You can get out of my way and point out the students listed on this arrest warrant so that we can take them in for questioning."

"I don't believe so, Amos. You have no authority within the walls of Hogwarts. Lord Gryffindor, Lord Hufflepuff, and myself hold absolute authority. Since we are three of the four Founder's Heirs, the Board of Governors has been dissolved and Hogwarts is exempt from your little power plays."

"You will either turn them over or be arrested yourselves!" Amos was irate; how dare these people defy him, the Minister! What he didn't notice was that every student in the Great Hall, over three hundred of them, from firsties through seventh year, also had their wands out. He also did not realize that the exaggerated yawn Harry made was a signal.

"Stupify!" The spell was cast by every student with the ability, all aimed at the Aurors. The DMLE people went down like sacks of potatoes, then Harry called out, "Accio Auror's wands!" The summoned wands flew to his hand and he passed them back to Draco, who was standing behind him. Scowling, Harry strode up to Diggory and poked him in the chest with his index finger, driving him back.

"Amos, as Lord Hufflepuff-Potter-Black, every one of these people are under my personal protection and I am declaring full Line Protection under all three houses for each and every one of them. That means if they are molested in any way, you will personally answer to me. You have crossed a line that should have been left alone. I tell you now, either tear up that arrest warrant or we will clear an area of the Great Hall and you and I will duel. It will be a duel of honor and it will be to the death."

As Amos sputtered, Flickaxe came out from behind a curtain off to the side. "Minister," he growled, "Lord Hufflepuff and several of the people named in your warrant, namely Miss Hermione Granger and Justin Finch-Fletchley have been named as 'Friends of the Goblin Nation'. You are already on shaky ground attempting to collect taxes in Goblin owned territory, namely Liberty Mall; take any action against any of these people and the Gringotts Board has authorized me to declare war on the British Ministry of Magic. Do you want to be known as the Minister who caused the first Goblin Rebellion in over three hundred years? Think hard on your answer Minister."

"So Amos, do we have an understanding?" asked Harry.

"Yes but," Amos pointed at Arthur and Percy, "You two are sacked as of right now. That is in my purview. You can also kiss your pensions goodbye."

Arthur laughed. "Still trying to get your turn in the pissing contest? I'm

not really worried about it; your replacement will more than likely reinstate us with full benefits. That would, of course include Amelia. In the meantime, I have the Gryffindor vault to fall back on and Amelia has the Bones estate. It's pretty damned stupid to try to get even with wealthy people by taking away their civil service jobs. I think I am due for a vacation anyway."

"What do you mean 'my replacement'?"

"Simple Amos," said Amelia, "Once the Wizengamot finds out that you brought us to the brink of war with the goblins, a war that would have sealed the Gringotts vaults to every wizard in Britain, I expect your time left in office will be counted in minutes, not years. Now if Minerva and company will enervate your Aurors, you can be on your way back to begin packing up your office while Lord Hufflepuff calls for a session of the Wizengamot."

"Now let's not be hasty, I apologize," Amos gulped, "I admit that I made a huge mistake. Can we just start over, all three of you can be reinstated."

"I don't know," Harry grinned evilly. "I can get all of that anyway by calling the Wizengamot into session. Hey Percy, want to be appointed as the new Minister?"

"I'm not sure Harry, I mean the perks are pretty good but lately it seems to be more of a temporary job. Bill could probably do a better job as long as I was his Undersecretary. He gets along well with the Goblins and he could open all sorts of jobs up for other Weasleys. If he doesn't want it, Fred and George could take turns running the Ministry and their shop, one week at a time for each of them. They would have every department head either sporting red hair or growing feathers in no time."

Harry lost any bit of humour in his visage. He strode up to Amos and poked him in the chest with his finger. "Amos, I want to suggest to

you that you pretend you have a Time-Turner. That device is taking you back to your morning cup of tea; all the neat ideas you had this morning suddenly look like really bad ideas. You're going to scrap those ideas and go into the office, then you will actually ask for advice from people you trust, such as the head of the DMLE, Madam Bones. You could also get some good ideas from trusted advisors like the Weasleys. Are you getting an idea of where I am going with this?"

Amos nodded so fast that he almost resembled Dobby. "Yes Lord Hufflepuff. May I ask just one question of these people? Why are you trying to topple our society? Is it not bad enough that You-Know-Who and his ilk are trying to destroy us from one direction, why must you knock away at the remaining pins of Britain?"

Harry started to say something but was stopped by Justin Finch-Fletchley. "Harry, I believe I am a bit closer to this situation, in fact my name was on one of those arrest warrants. Minister, as a wealthy pureblood in this society, you have never known the deprivation of freedom. Yes, the country was at war, but until the death of your son, not even that touched you very deeply."

"During the hols, I traveled with my father to a convention in the United States, in Chicago. This was all in the muggle world, so I won't bore you with details. Suffice to say, while I was in a restaurant, I picked up a small book of essays to read while I ate. A Yank named Hamilton Wrye wrote a short essay in that book that really touched me and got me thinking." Justin pulled a well worn booklet from his robe pocket. It was entitled "Essays on Freedom" He flipped it open to the middle and began to read:

"A Dog Named Liberty"

"So many times I have heard or read stories about other people's struggle for freedom, but brushed it off with the old Southern

expression of "I ain't got a dog in that fight". The older I get, however, the more I realize the error of that line of thought. Let me tell you about this dog.

She is a battle scarred mongrel bitch as old as mankind, spoken of with awe by people who have never known her. Her name is Liberty.

She climbs into the pit every time some wretched soul lashes inner tubes together, braving dehydration, starvation, and predators to reach the land where Liberty lives. Countless times she has used her razor sharp teeth and claws against her twin opponents, Oppression and Tyranny. She does not always win, many times because her guardians have muzzled her, but she always brings her heart and soul to the fight. She has a brave spirit and fierce loyalty.

What is her background? Part of her ancestry is Jewish, finding a home with Moses as he led millions of Hebrews out of 400 years of Egyptian slavery. She has a little Greek in her, residing for a time with Spartacus, when he tried to throw off the yoke of Roman servitude. She rode the Mayflower with the Pilgrims to the new world. She won a victory over a century later, but it was not as decisive as it should have been, since many of her charges remained in oppression and slavery. It would take almost another century and thousands of gallons of spilt blood to win, at least on paper that unqualified victory, and another century before her name was no longer a goal, but rather a fact for all of her guardians.

She is revered by the Cubano who looks northward to her home, the Mexicano crushed by the weight of poverty and oppression, the Haitian fleeing the ton-ton macout and a "friendly" dictator. She is sought by Chinese women fleeing forced abortion, the Sudanese Christian held in slavery by Sudanese Muslims, and Bosnian Muslims fearing rape and murder by Serbian "Christians"

In every arena in which she has fought, she has left her offspring, some to flourish, but most drowned at birth or crippled in infancy.

Although revered by oppressed peoples throughout the world, we, her guardians, those who have benefited most from her struggles, have allowed her to become infested by parasites, we kick her when she inconveniences us and sadly, attempt to have her put to sleep, considering her old and useless.

If we continue abusing her, she will not die, but she may leave us to find a more worthy guardian.

Her name is Liberty."

Justin closed the booklet and calmly looked Amos Diggory in the eye. "Minister, Voldemort wants to destroy the country, killing all whom he does not enslave. The difference between now and what will happen should he win is that the purebloods will be enslaved, the lesser bloods will either flee or die. Harry will more than likely have to fight Voldemort, possibly all of us will be called to service to protect what we hold dear. What I and the other mudblooders are doing is attempting to give us a reason to fight! We want a just society built not on the privilege caused by an accident of birth, but on our abilities and the content of our character. We will create that just society, and we will raise an army of hope! That army will follow Harry Potter and other leaders of justice in kicking that abomination called Voldemort back into the grave he escaped in 1981. This time we will make sure he stays dead!"

"Mr. Diggory, I knew and looked up to Cedric for almost four years. Cedric was a brave and noble credit to Hufflepuff house. He never put on airs or tried to lord it over anyone because he was a wealthy pureblood heir, and I believe that if you look deep in your heart and remember your son, you would see that he would most likely agree with us. We bear you no ill-will Minister, but we are fighting for our freedoms and our futures in the wizarding world and we will win!"

"Yes Mr. Finch-Fletchley, I do believe you will win, but at what cost?"

We are not American muggles, we have time honored traditions that make us what we are."

"Time honored traditions such as buying influence and favor through bribery? Or such traditions as forcing all non-purebloods into menial work and being the major support to a government where we have no representation? All while the favored few have their parties and Yule Balls paid for by the sweat of the people whom they despise and keep downtrodden! British wizarding society is rotten to the core Minister, but a new wind is blowing. That dog named Liberty has gotten off the boat and is making a guest appearance in Magical Britain. Let's see what we can do with her."

Justin's words, although spoken to the Minister, carried throughout the Great Hall. Amos looked stricken as the other students began to cheer and chant "Liberty, Liberty, Liberty!" Minerva nudged Pomona Sprout and whispered: "If we still had the old House system, I would be awarding Hufflepuff enough points that they could have the House Cup without having to answer any test questions the rest of the school year."

Sprout smiled. "I'm proud of him also, but please don't award all of those points to his dorm, I lost him in the reorganization. He's in Filius' dorm now."

As the Minister and his retinue, defeated, turned to leave, Hermione rushed in a side door, grabbed Harry's sleeve and whispered: "We need to have a meeting right now; I have Severus and Remus on their way in. If possible, I would also like to have Justin join us, part of this will be of interest to him."

Harry nodded. "Get everyone together and we will meet in Myrtle's bathroom. Will a half hour be sufficient?" At Hermione's assent, he went over to speak with Arthur and Minerva.

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Chamber of Secrets

"Alright Hermione, you called the meeting, what do you have to report?" The War Room was filled to overflowing, the Nobles, former Order members, and newly invited members of the Mudblood Corps crowded around the oversized conference table.

"The first thing is the best, although it doesn't affect the Mudblooders. Severus, if you could come up here?" The snarky Potions Master got up from his seat and stood next to her. There was a gasp from those in the know when she reached over and pulled up the man's left sleeve. It was unmarred, having no sign of ever bearing the Dark Mark. "It was not an easy thing to do, breaking the different components down to break the soul bond and life bond inside the body, but once those threads from the Mark to the aorta and pre-frontal cortex were sealed off and the bleeding staunches, a potion was used to attack the elements of the Protean Charm that makes up the Mark. It literally dissolved and was passed out of the body with the rest of the waste."

"How hard was the procedure; could be taught in order to set up Mark removal stations?" asked Harry.

"It was a fairly complicated procedure, but I believe that it could be done with a team of two Healers and two Charms experts. The potion would have to be on hand so that it could be taken as soon as the tendrils are removed and cauterized. The Healers would have to be very competent in order to correct the damage to the circulatory system by the removal. We ended up using a heart specialist from St. Mungo's. We had her take a vow of silence until such time as we could get everything approved."

"Severus, how do you feel? Was the procedure very hard on you?" Minerva asked.

"Even though I was not able to have any anesthetic because of the volatility of the potion, it was still less painful than the placement of the Mark." Snape smirked, "As for how I feel now, I feel as if I have been reborn. These months that the Dark Lord has been making his displeasure with me known through the Mark have been somewhat tedious."

"Tedious! If it is anything like the pain he sent me through my scar, I would call that a vast understatement." Harry rubbed his forehead. "All right, so we put some pressure on Amos and the Wizengamot to announce an amnesty period for all Death Eaters who want to be freed of Voldemort, then set up some system where we can verify their intentions before sending them to the Healer teams. I will pay all costs associated with the removals, it is more likely to pass that way. Now, what's next on the agenda?"

"I do have one other item, but I would like to wait on that until every one else is finished," said Hermione.

"Okay Severus, You will want to be brewing as much of the potion as possible in a short amount of time. Remus, what do you have?"

"The werewolves have pretty much abandoned Riddle after Greyback was killed. They had a plan to give them all Wolfsbane potion so that they could be more effective during a full moon attack. The majority of the packs want the potion, but not to use as a weapon. Moody and I took a team and raided Riddle's potion ingredient cache, by the way, thank you Severus for helping us find it... We now have a corner on the Wolfsbane market. We made an agreement with the three major packs to supply them with the potion in return for an Unbreakable vow to stay out of the war at the least. The magical werewolves took the vow and also vowed to keep the muggle werewolves under control. I could not get them to actually support us, they see us as too close to the Ministry that oppresses them."

"Neutrality is still better than open hostility. Is there any word on other magical creatures?"

"Other than the Goblins, pretty much nothing. The Centaurs, Mer-people and Vampires have said that they will defend their own turfs should they be attacked by either side, but they see this as a war between wizards and don't really want to be involved. The Giants decided to stay out of Britain when Moody showed them the power of his 'superwand'. Never think that giants are stupid, they know what extinction means."

"What in Merlin's name is a superwand'?" Harry asked, curiously.

Moody stood up;. "The muggle PM gave us access to some military weapons and had some of their soldiers train us in the operation. What I call a superwand is also known as an RPG-7. It makes a big bang with lots of noise and fire, impressed the heck out of the Gurg. He promised to sit this one out. The muggles have some other weapons that scare the hell out of me, I hope we never have to use them or give the muggles cause to use them on us." The non muggleborn looked shaken, anything that scared Mad-Eye Moody was something they never wanted to see.

"Do we have any idea where Voldemort is now?" Harry asked.

"He was last reported in France, but heading back this way," Amelia reported. "The French won't do anything, they are holding their breath hoping that he doesn't cause too many problems there. My understanding is that he has picked up some new supporters from the French branch of the Malfoys. Would you know anything about that, Lord Malfoy?"

Draco stood. "Unfortunately I do; I just received an owl message from Francois Malfoi this morning, he is the patriarch there. He wanted to let me know that several family members have joined the Dark Lord's forces. He wanted me to receive them as family, also

gave me a lot of grief for not following in Lucius' footsteps. I sent word to Gringotts to make sure that they were denied any access to family funds and contracted them to put the Malfoy properties under the Fidelus charm. Mother is at the main manor, however I have asked Griphook to be my secret keeper for the manor. I would rather pay the price to the Goblins than have one more knut go to the Dark Lord."

"Good on you, mate. With Riddle on the move back here, I suggest that everyone who's family was involved with Voldemort to do the same thing. All of you may have broken away, but he still knows where you live. Flickaxe, can you take the orders back to Gringotts to have anyone here who wants their properties protected to put up wards to keep him out?" Flickaxe nodded in agreement.

"I believe that we can set up a discount rate for anyone here," he said. "Letting the new Noble's wealth fall into his hands would be very bad for business. Can I have a show of hands for the Fidelus?" All of the new Nobles raised their hands, "Excellent, I will contact your account managers and have them set up as your secret keepers until such time as you might want to choose someone else. Gringotts will actively support your faction, Lord Hufflepuff. Not the Ministry, they have shown they cannot be trusted, but you can."

"Thank you Flickaxe, you don't know how much that means to me. Is there anything else?" Looking around, he saw no others needing to speak. "All right Hermione, what is the other thing you had for us?"

"I was doing some researching in some of the books left behind by the late Headmaster, history books to be exact. I found something that was somewhat shocking. Has anyone here ever heard of Merlin's Oath?"

Seeing their puzzled faces, she continued. "I found a reference to it in one of the books in the restricted section of the library. It made me curious, so I asked Professor Binns about it. He told me that it was

nothing more than a legend, much like the 'supposed' Chamber of Secrets." Hermione looked at Harry with a wry smile. "Most of us know how much of a 'legend' that turned out to be! To make a long story short, I found five different books centered around the Oath, all written about attempts to circumvent the Oath. I found these in Dumbledore's private collection he unwittingly left here, and in the Black family library. It seems that, although there have been many attempts to circumvent the Oath, no attempt has ever succeeded."

"Just what is this Oath, that it is so important?" asked Justin, impatiently.

"Oops," Hermione blushed, "I sometimes forget the most important parts, not realizing that the people to whom I am speaking haven't been there to read the books. Anyway, as the story goes, Merlin and Arthur Pendragon were not just allies, they were close friends. Arthur knew that Merlin was loyal, but he also knew that he was mortal. There were not that many magic users in Britain at the time, Merlin and LeFey being the most powerful, but it was conceivable that others born of power might either join with a rival or overthrow the throne to claim it for themselves. He brought his concerns to Merlin who told Arthur he would see what he could do. This was close to the end of the recorded history of Merlin being in the Camelot court. What Merlin came up with was an oath wrapped in several charms and curses. The Oath pledged fealty to the legitimate monarch of Britain, but became binding on any magical person in Britain, whether born here or not. The way that it became binding was for any magical person to use the name 'Merlin', be it in conversation, a curse or blessing, or even in a history lesson. How many times have any of us used his name in a curse or blessing?" Seeing the nods of understanding, she smiled. "That's right, everyone here. Without even knowing it, we have bound ourselves to the Oath."

"In 988 CE, under King Ethelred II, also known as Aethelred the Unready, who in addition to being King of England, was also a minor wizard known for his erratic spellwork and lousy potion brewing,

Magical Britain was allowed a large measure of self rule as well as separation from the muggle world. This was also the year that the Statute of Secrecy was enacted to protect the magical world from the mundane society. I looked up the document at the Ministry archives; it was signed and sealed by none other than Ethelred II, and had as his authority 'The Oath of Merlin'! The self-rule treaty, which was also there at the Ministry, stated that the Crown had the right to oversee any government the wizards set up as well as dissolve any governmental body that was established. A portion of all taxes goes to the Royal Treasury as a reminder that Wizarding Britain is still subject to the Crown. We are not taught this in History classes because of the belief in the natural superiority of magical people over the mundane. The people who are actually in the know do not want it to be known to the general population; purebloods are especially touchy about it. That is why purebloods such as the Dumbledores and Blacks were so eager to find a way to circumvent the Oath; they hated the fact that any muggle could hold authority and the power of magic over them."

"What are the penalties for breaking the Oath?" asked Harry.

"It is actually very hard to break it, since there is a strong compulsion charm built into it. Minor infractions, such as attempting to circumvent it, would cause descendants to either have weakened magic or begin producing more non magical children. Severe violations could cause a total loss of magic, in effect making the violator into a muggle. In the case of minor violators, the family could seek a pardon from the reigning Monarch, in serious cases, there is no pardon; the oath-breaker is cast from our world and becomes property of the Monarch."

"Hmm," mused Minerva, "This could explain why so many pureblood families have died out or become weak. I just wonder if it would affect Harry's offspring for the Black family."

"I honestly do not know," said Hermione. "Just to be safe though,

Harry should ask the Queen for a pardon for any transgressions by the Black family. Maybe it could be suggested as sort of a wedding gift."

"In that case," said Harry. "I would like you to be my representative and have you meet the Queen's protocol people in advance of the wedding. You can also make any other requests you think necessary." Harry gave her a wink and gestured toward Justin.

"Put in a good word for us as well," said Flickaxe. "It would be nice for all magical creatures to have the same rights. Should she agree, the Goblin nation would owe a debt of honor to both the Queen and you; this is not something to be taken lightly."

"With that, let us adjourn this meeting for now," said Harry. "If anything new comes up, you will all be notified. Now, however, my brides have informed me that I am to play the part of a dress-up mannequin so they can color coordinate me."

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Calais, France

The Dark Lord Voldemort, having swelled his ranks with French purebloods eager to be the new nobility in Britain, entered a muggle travel agent's office. It was humiliating to him to have to disguise himself as a muggle in order to sneak back into Britain with his troops in such a way that his enemies would not be alerted to his presence. With him were Delores Umbridge and a muggle he had put under the Imperius curse in order to book passage on a tour bus going through the Chunnel. At least one of the French Malfoy heirs had the good sense to kidnap a wealthy muggle to charter the bus.

Thirty minutes and several thousands francs later, an odd assortment of 'tourists were nervously boarding the charter bus in order to launch the strangest invasion of British soil in the history of

that land.

Voldemort chuckled to himself. They would never know what hit them!

Chapter 28

The Mudblood Revolution

Chapter 5

Merlin's Oath

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Ministry Announces Amnesty for Death Eaters!

Diggory Claims Ability to Remove Dark Mark!

Exclusive to The Daily Prophet

Staff Writer Ulysses Ben Scroud

In a shocking reversal of policy, the Ministry of Magic has announced that marked followers of Lord Whatshisname who want to leave his ranks will be given the opportunity to rejoin decent wizarding society and escape Azkaban prison. All Death Eaters who have repented of their activities in this war can surrender themselves to the Ministry and have their Mark of Loyalty (the Dark Mark) removed. They would not be required to fight for the Light, they would just be required to take a binding oath of neutrality. Any crimes they had been involved in up to that point would be pardoned.

This reporter asked Minister Diggory how he could free repentant Death Eaters from Lord Thingy's service. He had this to say; "It has been known for quite some time that the Mark Lord Whosis brands his followers with has been irremovable and, in the event of their master's death, fatal. He uses it to maintain their complete obedience as well as an instrument of torture. A crack team of researchers has discovered a way to break the hold of the Dark Mark and remove it without any permanent aftereffects. I have seen the proof; Potions

Master Severus Snape, a courageous fighter for the Light in the last war, took the Mark at the behest of Albus Dumbledore in order to spy for the Light. The Dark Whatsits discovered his role and tortured him for a long time through the Mark. The research team used their findings to remove this instrument of torture from Mr. Snape.; he volunteered to be a test subject. Severus Snape is now free from the power that the False Lord once held over him. By the way, for his courage and tireless service for the Light, I am also announcing that Severus Snape is to be awarded the Order of Merlin, Second Class, along with a monetary award of 10,000 galleons."

Minister Diggory also announced that several Mark removal stations would be set up throughout Britain and the surrounding countries of France, Belgium, and Spain.

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Folkstone, UK

Calais Tour Company

The service technician looked at the readings on his meter once again, shook his head, and called for his supervisor. "Guv'nr, I'm not sure what to make of this. I've gone through this bus at least five times and I can't figure out what's wrong. All the electronics on the bus went wonky half way through the Chunnel. We had to tow the bus in; everything is reading all right, but it acts as if every electronic circuit is completely fried."

"Where is the driver? He might be able to tell what happened."

"He continued on with the tour group on the new bus. Odd looking lot they were; I knew the French were strange, but this bunch took the cake."

At that moment, the supervisor's phone rang. He went over to

answer it, listened for a few moments, then returned.

"You'll need to go out with the tow lorry; the driver from this bus just called, and from a pay telephone. He is saying that the new bus broke down the same way, and even his radio and cell phone quit working. His tour group, all but the man who booked the charter, just got off the bus and disappeared. He says the client acted like he just woke up and began demanding to know why he was on a bus in England, says he has no idea of what has happened the last six hours. Bloody fool, I'm sure he just wants to get out of paying the charter; doesn't realize that with all of the mechanical problems that the company would be refunding him anyway."

"What if I can't find out what is wrong with the other bus?"

The supervisor shrugged his shoulders. "Since it is the same driver on both busses and the same problem, we can chalk it up to driver error. He'll get sacked and we'll be covered."

"Poor sap."

"Hey, that's life"

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Diagon Alley

Later that day

Pierre Lafort, a recent French recruit to Voldemort's Death Eaters, sat down heavily in the booth at the Leaky Cauldron. He ordered a cup of tea when he could not get coffee, then opened the copy of the Daily Prophet his Master had instructed him to buy. The Dark Lord wanted to catch up on news in Britain before he made his next plans. Pierre was now regretting having joined the Dark Lord's service, the past few weeks, because of his natural curiosity and a clumsiness

that Nymphadora Tonks would sympathize with; he asked too many questions and stumbled a few too many times, he had been a frequent target of Voldemort's and Umbridge's 'discipline'. After several bouts of the Cruciatus curse and Mark torture, he was beginning to wonder just what he had gotten himself into. Glancing at the front page of the Prophet, he stiffened in shock. He read the article, wondering if it could possibly be a ruse to draw out Death Eaters for prison and/or execution. After reading the article, he thought back to a scene he had stumbled upon the previous week.

Voldemort and Umbridge had been speaking to each other, not expecting to be overheard. Voldemort had been complaining to Umbridge that he was not able to sense Severus Snape through his mark anymore, therefore could not give him his proper punishment for being a spy. It was at that point that Pierre had tripped, bringing the pair's attention to him. After a brutal Legilimency probe and some good old fashioned Cruciatus curses for his nosiness, Pierre had been sent on his way with a warning to never eavesdrop on his Master again.

Gathering his courage, Pierre folded his paper and walked over to Tom's Floo connection. He put a sickle in the jar, took a pinch of powder and threw it in.

"Ministry of Magic!"

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Ministry of Magic

London

The well dressed, haughty looking French wizard appeared in the fireplace, stepped out gracefully, then tripped and fell flat on his face. He was helped up by a pink haired young lady who, when she had assisted him, also tripped and fell to the floor, carrying the wizard

down with her. The guard at the wand weighing station catcalled out.

"Hey Tonks, a relative of yours?"

Both wizard and witch scrambled up and dusted themselves off while shooting death glares at the guard. Pierre was the first to speak.

"Mademoiselle," he said, taking the newspaper and opening it to the article, "Can you tell me where I would go to ... how you say it, take advantage of it?"

"You have the Dark Mark?" she asked stiffly.

"Oui, much to my shame."

She smiled. "First let's get your visitor badge." She led him over to the reception counter and told the receptionist, "This is Mr...." She looked at him

"Lafort, Pierre Lafort."

"Yes, he will be a visitor to the DMLE," Tonks said.

The receptionist popped her gum, then waved her wand at a small box. A nametag popped out and she handed it to Pierre. The tag read: Lafort Pierre Lafort, Visitor DMLE. Tonks shook her head as they turned away. "Sometimes she takes things a bit too literally. Come on over to the wand weighing station."

The two walked over to the wand weighing station where Pierre handed his wand to the guard. He put it on a scale, and a small piece of parchment came out.

"Weeping Willow, 13 inches, with a Veela hair, been in use for 13 years?"

"Oui."

Tonks reached over and took the wand, stowing it in her robe pocket. "I'm sure you're a nice guy, but since you are the first to take advantage of this new policy, we have to make sure that you have not been sent here by You-Know-Who to cause havoc." She took his elbow and led him over to the lift, looking for all the world as if he were a friend out for a stroll, in reality controlling his movements as any good Auror should.

Arriving at the DMLE office, Tonks bade Pierre to have a seat while she retrieved Madam Bones. A few seconds later, the steely haired head of the DMLE came into the waiting room and smilingly shook hands with Lafort.

"If you will just come this way, we need to debrief you before you have your mark removed. The mark removal station was just set up in an office down the hall, but we have to summon the team of Healers from St. Mungos and the charms masters from the Department of Mysteries to perform the removal. Have a seat and I'll explain what is going to happen." Pierre sat and she continued.

"Now Mr. Lafort, in order to make sure that you have a complete pardon, we have to know of any crimes you may have committed while in service to You-Know-Who. In order to do this, I will be questioning you under Veritaserum with a witness present to take your statement. Any additional information you can give us about the Dark Lord's movements or plans will be very much appreciated. I will have Auror Tonks witness your statement."

"Zat beautiful young lady is one of your Aurors?" Pierre asked in shock.

Amelia smiled. "Don't be fooled by her looks and youth, she was trained by Mad-Eye Moody and can be as deadly as an enraged lion."

"Merci for zee warning, I vas planning to ask her for a date. She might be too dangerous for me zo."

"Probably not a good idea, she has a tame werewolf she is seeing right now."

"Oui, any woman who can tame a werewolf eez probably too dangerous for me. I am a lover, not a fighter."

"Considering your last playmates, I find that a bit hard to believe."

"Eez ze truth, zee Seigneur Foncé, eh, Dark Lord, made eet zound like eet vould be a, how jou zay eet, lark. Ve vould be zee new nobility of zees country."

"I assume that you found his actions and his words to be somewhat in conflict," Amelia said dryly.

"Oui."

At that point, Tonks came in with the sealed vial of Veritaserum. Madam Bones took the parchment for the statement, noted the batch number on it, then set the quill for auto-dictate. Tonks broke the seal on the vial and administered the mandatory three drops onto Pierre's tongue. Amelia began the questioning.

"What is your name?"

"Pierre Lafort."

"Are you a marked Death Eater?"

"Oui"

"Have you been sent here on orders from the Dark Lord or any of his

underlings"

"Non"

"Are you, of your own free will, here to renounce your association with the Dark Lord and his plans to overthrow wizarding society?"

"Oui"

"Are you willing to assist us with information that could help us track the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters, along with any plans you might know of?"

"Oui"

After a grueling twenty minute session, where Pierre gave up the present location of Voldemort (on a muggle farm where he had the owners under the Imperius), the story of how he was recruited, and other sundry information such as the names of other recruits as well as Voldemort's inner circle, Pierre was given the antidote and swore an oath to renounce Voldemort and return to France. He was then taken to the removal station where he underwent the painful procedure to remove the mark. Amelia then took his picture for propaganda purposes, had his pardon signed by the Minister, and gave him an authorization for a Ministry funded international portkey which would return him to France. All in all, they had not had much to pardon, he was basically a pretty nice guy who had been caught up in Voldemort's manipulations and had not even cast any Unforgivables.

As Tonks was leaving her boss' office, she remarked, "He was pretty cute, if I wasn't involved with Remus, I might give him a whirl."

"He thought you were a bit of a 'belle fille' yourself, but when I told him who trained you and that you had a tame werewolf, he decided you were much too dangerous for him."

Tonks' coworkers wondered at the smile she wore the rest of the day.

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Buckingham Palace

Hermione Granger was just finishing a session with Her Majesty's protocol team, planning for Harry's wedding, when suddenly the team stiffened and came to attention. Hermione glanced behind herself, gasped and quickly stood and bowed her head to her Sovereign.

"Please sit down. Might you be Miss Granger, Lord Hufflepuff's protocol representative?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Miss Granger, please follow me, We would speak with you about your world. Other than occasional reports with little information from the Prime Minister, I know little about this group of my subjects." The Queen led Hermione into an adjoining sitting room and ordered refreshments from a gentleman in a pinstriped suit who seemed to act as her batman. Once the tea and biscuits had been served, she waved her shadow away, leaving them in privacy.

"Tell me, Miss Granger, of your background. Your surname is not one I have associated with the wizarding world. Were you born to a mundane family?"

"Yes ma'am." The two spent a pleasurable hour and a half, quite a lot of time for a busy monarch, speaking of Hermione's background, her invitation to attend Hogwarts, and all of her adventures at the school. They also spent a bit of time talking about the state of the wizarding world in general, the bias against the muggleborn and half-bloods, and the fact that there was an education drain with other countries

benefitting from the racial prejudice that was the norm in Britain. Although she hid it well, the Queen was seething over the mistreatment of so many of her subjects. She asked pointed questions about Merlin's Oath, then rang her shadow and gave him explicit instructions on researching the archives for anything dealing with the Oath. He gave her a strange look, but acquiesced.

"I really did not want him to become aware of your world at this time, however it was unavoidable. I rely on him so much sometimes. I suppose when his assignment is over, I will have to contact your Ministry through the PM and have that part of his memory altered, along with any of the archive staff. I really do not like to do things like that, but the secrecy must be maintained, I suppose. This is too large of a secret for even the Official Secrets Act.

"Ma'am, have you ever thought of putting muggleborn or squibs in charge of the archives dealing with the magical world?"

"No, but that seems to be a capital idea. Please write a proposal with any names you can think of for people who might fit that career."

"Yes ma'am." With an assignment given to her from the Queen herself, Hermione would be a driven woman until she could complete it to perfection. To be sure, one of the names she would put forward would be her own; she could almost feel her fingers on rare and ancient manuscripts.

With more small talk about Harry, Ron, and her adventures, the Queen seemed to be taking measurement of her guest, then suddenly spoke.

"Miss Granger, I really must hurry off to another appointment, however I would like to meet your friends and your parents. They should be proud to have raised such an intelligent and courageous daughter. I would like you, Lord Hufflepuff, young Mr. Weasley and your parents to come here to the palace next week, say Wednesday

evening. I will have a driver pick all of you up at your parent's home."

"Yes ma'am, we will be there." After all, when the Queen gives an order like that, what is there to say but yes?

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The Granger House

Oxford

Dan Granger checked his tie for the forty seventh time while making sure his hair was in perfect order. He was a fervent monarchist, having pledged his service in the Regiment many years before. Never in his wildest dreams had he ever even dreamed of meeting Her Majesty, and the fact that his seventeen year old daughter had delivered the Queen's invitation made it seem that much more surreal. He turned from the mirror and observed the crowd of people in his living room. The invitations for each person had included who they could bring along as guests, and the group had quite an eclectic mix. Ron Weasley had his parents, Mrs. Weasley exchanging recipes in the kitchen while Arthur Weasley was bent down in fascination studying, of all things, the extension cord connecting his telly and VCR. Harry Potter was pointing out various differences in his normal home versus a wizarding home to his two future wives. TWO! Dan knew that there was no way he could ever tell his wife Jane that he needed another wife, no matter what the circumstances. Not only would any sane person not want more than one wife at a time, but even if he had two, Jane would make sure that the purpose for having two wives would remain unfulfilled. A sympathy pain in his groin made him wince. That Potter kid had no idea what he was in for, but Dan had to give him points for bravery. Or stupidity, whichever the case. The girls looked around the room at the various appliances and fixtures with interest. Hermione brought her boyfriend, Terry Boot, a boy she seemed to be very interested in. He smiled, as much as she had written about Harry and Ron those first few years, he was

glad that she had found someone who could give her the intellectual stimulation she so needed. It was a sure thing that Ron would not have been able to do it, and he didn't want his little girl to be part of some harem.

Dan wondered what the drivers of the cars would think of the odd dress of the magicals in the party. All of the wizards and witches, with the exception of Hermione, wore dress robes with embroidered crests on the breasts. The Weasleys had the Gryffindor family crest, Arthur with a gold chevron denoting Head of House, Ron with silver showing that he was Heir. Daphne had the Greengrass crest with gold, along with the Black crest and a pip showing that she was betrothed to the Head. Jennifer had the Dumbledore and Potter crests, while Harry had the Hufflepuff, Potter, and Black crests, all with gold chevrons. Terry Boot, another muggleborn, had a small patch showing that he was affiliated with Hogwarts Ravenclaw house, as well as the Hogwarts crest. A knock on the door signaled the arrival of the cars and an end to Dan's musing.

Dan's question about the driver's reaction was answered when he opened the door for the driver. He did not bat an eye at the odd dress of his passengers. He led the group to the curb where three stretch limousines awaited. The group split into family groups, the Grangers and Terry in the first car, Weasleys in the second, and Harry and his young ladies in the third. Throughout the ride, the question in his mind was 'why?'. It broke every 'rule' in Dan's thinking about not only the Queen, but also the magical world. He never thought that the Queen would even have contact with magicals.

Sooner than he thought possible, the cars slid through the gates of Buckingham Palace and pulled up to the entrance. They were quickly ushered into a cozy room with rows of chairs facing front. On the floor in front was a small red pillow. Once the group was seated, a page announced Her Majesty, causing the group to rise for her entrance. She strode in, motioned everyone to take their seats, then began to speak.

"For many years, two societies, the magical and mundane in Britain have, by necessity, lived apart with little to no contact. The reasons for this separation are many, with grievous cause. Magicals were targeted because of ignorance and malice, mundanes were fearful of the powers of their magical neighbors. The upshot of this has been two groups, dependant upon each other without knowledge or recognition, and values which, for the most part, are very different. This has caused, in many cases, friction between our worlds, with both sides suffering."

"Although secrecy must continue to be maintained, there are heroes and deeds which must be acknowledged in both worlds. Even though the magical people of Britain live, for the most part, separate from their mundane neighbors, all are still subjects of the Crown, with all rights and responsibilities associated with that status. Tonight we shall address an issue of importance to both our societies."

"Since 1970, there is one who claims Lordship over people in the magical world, a lordship neither earned nor legally granted. This false lord is a product of both our worlds, and a shame to both. He was born Tom Riddle, the product of an insane magical and a neglectful mundane. Raised in an orphanage, neglected and abused, he entered the magical world and was trained, as are most magicals, at the respected school of Hogwarts. He did not use this training responsibly, as the vast majority of magicals do, but rather to obtain power and subjugate the magical world, and to punish and control the mundane world."

"Take note of my words! Tom Riddle is not a lord, he is a terrorist! Good men and women, as well as children of both worlds have felt his evil. He made the magical world so fearful of him that they are afraid to say even his made up name. That evil was abruptly halted in 1981 by prophesy and the actions of a loving mother, a woman born in the mundane world but adopted by the magical. Her love and sacrifice stayed the hand of Tom Riddle for thirteen years, and saved

the life of her child, as well as children across Great Britain. Harry Potter, Lord Hufflepuff, please come forward."

Harry, stunned, went forward and bowed to the Queen. "Mr. Potter, in recognition of your mother, Lily Rose Evans Potter, and her service to the Crown and the magical world, this day, April 2, 1996, I, Elizabeth II, reigning monarch of Great Britain, hereby posthumously induct Lily Rose Evans Potter into the Order of the British Empire and confer upon her the rank of Dame Commander. Please accept, on her behalf, this medal and our sincere appreciation for DBE Lily Potter and our condolences on your loss of your mother and her nurturing."

Harry, caught off guard, and emotions showing nakedly on his face, choked out, "Thank you, Your Highness. I am proud to accept in the name of my mother." He bowed and returned to his seat while the others in the group clapped, many while daubing the tears from their eyes.

The Queen continued: "While Dame Potter's sacrifice brought peace to the land for the next ten years, her son for whom she gave her life was shunted aside into the neglect and abuse of uncaring relatives until the day he received his Hogwarts letter. During his trip to school for the first time, he met two other exceptional children, one born in the mundane world, one from an old pureblood family. They were sorted into the same house, that of Godric Gryffindor, a Lord by right and a knight of the British Empire. It is justly known as the House of the Brave. In their first year, they foiled a plot by Tom Riddle, working through a possessed professor to come back from the dead. With logic, skills, and bravery far exceeding their age, they took it upon themselves to take action when even the school professors ignored them. In their second year, a shade of Tom Riddle possessed a young girl and loosed a monster on the school. He would have been reborn and people killed if not for the actions of these three children. They stopped Riddle and his monster, almost paying with their own lives. In the third year, they assisted an innocent man, one who had

been imprisoned without trial, to attempt to clear his name while risking their lives once again to dark creatures that would steal their very souls. Unfortunately, Sirius Black died before his name was cleared, but he lost his life while battling the agents of Riddle, protecting his Godson. Lord Sirius Black did have two years of freedom from prison, even though on the run, he fought for the very world which condemned him. Lord Hufflepuff, would you please come forward?"

Harry was stunned, but went forward with numbed legs. He once again bowed and the Queen spoke.

"Lord Hufflepuff, as the heir of Lord Sirius Black and the new Lord Black, I ask you to receive the thanks of a grateful Sovereign and Nation. By my authority as Elizabeth II, reigning Monarch of Great Britain, I hereby posthumously induct Lord Sirius Black into the Order of the British Empire at the rank of Knight Commander and dub him Sir Black. Please accept this token of his office and Our condolences."

At this point, Harry was a wreck. He choked out his thanks to the Queen, took the medal and returned to his seat. Elizabeth continued.

"The next year, traitorous agents of Riddle schemed once again to bring him back. They forced a fourteen year old into a life threatening tournament meant for adults. The fourteen year old triumphed over the adults, but in a show of school solidarity, shared his victory with the designated co champion of his school. It was a fatal decision. His schoolmate was murdered by Riddle's agent, the fourteen year old's blood was forcibly taken to resurrect Riddle. He was chosen because he was considered a threat and an enemy to Riddle. This schoolchild dueled Riddle to a draw, and in the finest fighting tradition of the British Empire, recovered his friend's body while under fire, returning the body to his friend's family. His two friends assisted him once again during his ordeal, giving him logistical and moral support. He returned to warn the magical world of Riddle's return."

"Last year, he was ridiculed and slandered by a government and media that did not want to face the fact that Riddle had returned. A corrupt Minister and his Undersecretary used every tactic they could to shut him up, including torture and attempted murder. He was also tortured by Riddle through his cursed scar connection. In the midst of this, he and his friends did the job of the teachers, supplementing the Ministry's insufficient training by starting an underground defense society, then culminating the year with a raid on the very government building which should have been protected by their society's guardians, to prevent Riddle from capturing a weapon that could have overthrown the government. This is when Sir Black was murdered by his own cousin, an agent of Riddle and traitor to Great Britain. Six children fought twelve terrorists, besting them and capturing many of them."

"This year, they foiled a plot by a so-called Leader of the Light, one which would have cost the life of one of the three and given the magical world over to one who was almost as bad. It has been requested that this person not be named, since he was a hero to many and redeemed himself in the end at the cost of his own life. We shall let the matter drop. I would like Miss Hermione Granger, Mr. Ronald Weasley, and Lord Hufflepuff to come forward."

The room broke out into a buzz. The three teens came forward, standing before Elizabeth. The person that Hermione had dubbed 'the Queen's shadow' came forward, holding a sword. "Miss Granger, please kneel." Suddenly the pillow on the floor made sense.

"Hermione Granger. For your brilliance, perseverance, and courage in service to both the magical and mundane societies of the British Empire, I, Elizabeth II, reigning Monarch of Great Britain and the Magical British Empire, induct you into the Order of the British Empire with the rank of Dame Commander and dub thee Dame Hermione Granger. Please rise." Elizabeth placed a medallion around Hermione's neck, and with a very unqueenly show of

affection, gave her a quick hug. Hermione stepped back, eyes glistening.

"Ronald Weasley, please kneel." Ron did so. "Ronald Bulius Weasley, For your courage and loyalty under fire, and for your service in foiling the plots of the terrorist Tom Riddle and his agents, I, Elizabeth II, reigning Monarch of Great Britain and the Magical British Empire, induct you into the Order of Great Britain with the rank of Knight Commander, and dub thee Sir Ronald Weasley. Please rise, on second thought, you are so tall you may remain kneeling for a second more." To the chuckles of many in the room, Elizabeth reached over and placed the medallion around Ron's neck. "You may now rise."

"Lord Harry Potter-Black- Hufflepuff, please kneel. For your untiring courage under fire in the war against the terrorist Tom Riddle, and for your actions in foiling his plots against both magical and mundane Britain, at the risk of your own life, I, Elizabeth II, reigning monarch of Great Britain and the Magical British Empire, hereby induct you into the Order of Great Britain with the rank of Knight Grand Cross and dub thee Sir Harry Potter-Black. Please rise." Harry stood, and being much shorter than Ron, bowed his head to receive his medallion of office. The Queen dismissed them to their seats, then dropped another bombshell.

"We have heard of the discrimination against mundane-born subjects of ours in the magical world," Elizabeth's voice and visage became steely. The purebloods in the room began looking nervous and some gave audible gulps. "We are very unhappy about this situation, and will now act to rectify it. This also will address the discrimination against Our subjects suffering from incurable disease such as lycanthropy. Far too long have we unknowingly allowed this injustice to continue. EVERY British subject is entitled to fair and impartial treatment at the hands of their government and fellow subjects. I require from every magical person here a binding magical oath of silence on this next subject. You shall not speak of it until June first,

when it shall come into force."

Every magical in the room felt a compulsion to bring out their wands, and without knowing why, give an Oath of Silence to Elizabeth in regards to this subject. As eight wands glowed in response, she looked over at the Grangers. "Doctors Granger, this is to be covered, in your case, by the Official Secrets Act." Elizabeth held out her hand and her shadow handed her a rolled parchment.

"It is proclaimed on this second day of April, in the year of our Lord 1996, I, Elizabeth II, reigning Monarch of Great Britain and the Magical British Empire, and by authority of Merlin's Oath," There were gasps in the room as every magical felt the power of the Oath. "that the magical government of Britain shall be dissolved on the first day of June, 1996. It shall be governed at the pleasure of Her Majesty Elizabeth II through her Royal Governor to the magical world, Lord Gryffindor, Arthur Weasley, until a new government can be formed. The new government shall consist of a House of Lords, made up of the members of the former Wizengamot, a House of Commons elected by all citizens of magical Britain, regardless of blood status or medical condition. The House of Commons shall consist of any citizen, regardless of blood status or physical ailment, with 12 seats apportioned to the Goblin Nation. Goblins, although technically not subjects of the Crown, are still citizens of magical Britain, with all rights and responsibilities that entails. Should any goblin, or the Goblin Nation as a whole, swear an oath of fealty to the Crown, they would become self governing subjects of the Crown with all rights and responsibilities assigned to all subjects. The Minister of Magic shall be elected from the ranks of the House of Commons, much as the Prime Minister of Great Britain is elected."

"Be it also proclaimed, although slavery is abhorrent to the Crown, it is known that House Elves have a genetic condition that will kill them or rob them of their power if they are not bonded. This condition however, does not give humans the right to enslave them should they want freedom, nor allow for mistreatment. Therefore the Crown

imposes on all magical Britain, under the authority of Merlin's Oath, a Elvin Bill of Rights conferring the right to liberty should they desire and the right to fair treatment and wages. Any House Elf that desires may break their bondage and swear fealty to the Crown. This will bind them as subjects of the Crown and confer upon them the status of subject of the Crown, with all the attendant rights and responsibilities. They will also become full citizens of the Magical British Empire. Should they desire this, it would allow them to live with all of their magic intact."

"It is also proclaimed that magicals with lycanthropy shall no longer be considered creatures, but rather as British Magical subjects, with full rights. This also applies to human hybrids such as veela and giants. The Royal Governor shall, until such time as he is replaced by the new government, research the existing laws and regulations in the Magical British Empire, and void any law or regulation that violates the basic human rights enjoyed by all British subjects."

"One last matter is the irresponsibility of the magical press. It is proclaimed that the media of the Magical British Empire shall be subject to the same laws of slander and libel that apply to the media in mundane Great Britain. Other laws dealing with copyrights and patents shall also be imposed during the Governor's term of office. Lord Gryffindor, please come forward."

Arthur went to the front of the room and gave a bow. "Lord Gryffindor, Arthur Weasley at your service and command, Your Highness."

"Lord Gryffindor," Elizabeth said, handing him a rolled up set of parchments, "here is your commission to the Office of Governor to the Magical British Empire along with your charter and responsibilities."

Turning to the audience, the Queen declared, "This ceremony is over; please join us in the next room for dinner and social conversation. I would like to meet each and every one of you. Thank

you." The audience stood and followed her out of the room.

Later that evening during cocktails, Hermione managed to get Elizabeth's attention. "Your Majesty, I am curious about one thing; why did you delay the enactment of the proclamation until June first?"

Elizabeth just smiled. "I wanted to make sure that Harry would be back from his honeymoon."

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A/N: I really wanted to finish it up including the wedding, but there is just too much stuff to cover. I will write Merlin's Oath, Part 3 as soon as I can!

Chapter 29

The Mudblood Revolution

Chapter 6

Merlin's Oath, Part III

Disclaimer: I obviously do not own a billion dollar literary work, if I did, I would sell it to Rorschach's Blot just for the pleasure of reading books 8-50. In fact, I'm so poor I am going to be buried in a rented tuxedo... I will have the store bill our town council..

A/N: Sorry that it is taking so darned long to update, I keep getting waylaid by real life. I have also been getting tripped up by plot bunnies that have nothing to do with this story. Please look at the bottom of my profile page! There is a link there to my new blog/update site. I am posting some of my older stories first, but will also be posting WIP work in sections as I finish it.

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The Leaky Cauldron

London

The rest of the school year went by so fast that Harry and friends hardly realized where the time had gone. Before they knew it, final exams were upon them and Harry and his brides-to-be were preparing for their wedding. Today he was meeting with Arthur Weasley, the Queen's new Royal Governor to the magical world, not that same magical world knew it....yet. Arthur had agreed to walk Daphne down the aisle in lieu of her deceased Death Eater father. Arthur had been quietly assessing different people associated with the Ministry in order to build a core group to run everything once the Queen's edict became effective in June. Doing this without breaking

his secrecy oath was wearing on him; he looked like he had not slept in weeks.

" So Arthur, how is the staffing search going?" asked Harry.

"Not well Harry. There are too many departments that have hide-bound traditionalists manning them. It seems that every time I think I have someone figured out, they open their mouths and say something that would disqualify them for the post that I would like to offer. An example, I was looking at Perkins, the fellow who works with me at Misuse of Muggle Artefacts to head up the new Muggle Affairs Department. I took him out to lunch at that muggle Italian restaurant down the street from the Ministry, and when the waitress mixed up his order, he gave a twenty minute diatribe about how worthless muggles are and how they can't do anything right. I thought I was going to have to call in the Obliviators. Not exactly the kind of person I can have meeting with the Prime Minister."

Harry shook his head. "I don't envy you in the least. It seems that much of the Ministry is a living example of the 'Pieter Principle.'" At Arthurs quizzical look, he continued, "The Pieter Principle states that in any given organization, there will be people who are promoted to their level of incompetence. Once there, they stay forever. That said, I think that you are looking at this from the wrong angle. You already know that the Ministry is headed by a bunch of traditionalists; they will all have to be replaced."

"All of them, Harry? That will cause a panic in the ranks."

"No, you are just going to have to bring people up from the ranks. Recruit your department heads from those people who have been around long enough to know how the Ministry works, but not long enough to become too set in their ways. Look for the people who have been ridiculed for new ideas; make them your new department heads, just make sure that the ideas are compatible with the new Ministry policies. You are also going to have to close some

departments, or change the very focus of those departments."

"Such as?"

"Well, for one, the Department for Control of Magical Creatures. Right now, they are tasked with 'controlling' such sentient beings as werewolves, centaurs, vampires and others. What you are going to need there is more along the lines of embassies for sentient beings. Even better than that would be to recognize those beings as full fledged members of the community. There will be goblins, house elves and other beings in the new House of Commons, they should be held to the same standards as witches and wizards. They can have their communities with leaders chosen by their own means, but still equal under the law. A law that recognizes all as equal is what the Queen has tasked you with. You are also going to have to tear down all of the barriers that have held back people by discriminating by blood status or medical conditions. If I were you, I would get the assistance of a bunch of half blood and muggleborns to go through the discriminating laws and let them cut them out. You will need a working legal system and basic law the day you take office. Swear them to secrecy but don't tell them why you are doing it. That way you will not be violating your oath."

"That is quite a bit to chew on. I think that I will tap Remus Lupin for one of the departments. Do you think that Hermione would be available for some of the research?"

"I'm sure of it. You should ask her for copies of the Magna Carta and the United Nations conference on Human Rights documents. That would be a good start to levelling the playing field. You do know where your biggest problem is going to be, don't you?"

"The Department of Mysteries?"

"Right in one. They are independent of the Ministry, even in much of their funding. You are going to have to meet with Her Majesty and

have her bring them under your authority under Merlin's Oath. They will scream about it, but in the end, they will have to do it. Every government has secrets, but they still need accountability. There will probably be a time that they will need to report directly to Her Majesty, but for now they should report to the Governor."

"Just one more thing on an overloaded plate. Now why don't we talk about something really important? How are the wedding plans coming along?"

Harry laughed. "From my side, they are going well. Of course, for guys, we just have to show up on time, dressed in the right clothes and reasonably sober. Now as far as Daphne and Jennifer go....That's a whole different story. Absolutely nothing is right. The other morning, I walked into their quarters to give them each a kiss to start the day, they rolled out of bed, jumped on their menstrual cycles and ran my arse over!* Now I just try to stay out of their way."

"Are you succeeding?"

"Not as much as I would like. I do have the excuse that I am cramming for my N.E.W.T.S. With all of the private instructions, I am scheduled to take them a week before the wedding."

"When will the girls take theirs?"

"Right now we are shooting for December. They will be using tutors next year rather than going back to Hogwarts."

"When you finish your tests, come see me, I can figure out some place that you will fit in well."

"Arthur, with all due respect, I don't think that would be a good idea. We are trying to break the back of the pureblood faction controlling the Ministry. I need to find my place in life on my own merits, not because of who my parents were." Seeing the other man start to

object, he continued. "I know that it would not be the case with you, but the outside world would see me as no different than Lucius Malfoy, using his status to gain favourable treatment. I will keep my seats in the House of Lords, but that will be the extent of my government service."

"If you're sure Harry, far be it from me to contradict you. The last thing I need is to be seen as some sort of puppet with your hand up my back. I need to get back to the office; I've got the check."

The two men got up and got ready to leave, Arthur dropping a couple of galleons on their table to cover lunch.

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Harry originally planned to have his wedding during the Christmas break, however that was not to be. Besides the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to close Westminster Abbey for the remodelling during the Christmas break; the soonest he would allow the wedding and the refurbishing work was the week after Holy Week, culminating in Easter Sunday, but the girls also demanded more time to plan the wedding properly. Other than the obvious reason of sexual tension and wanting to start the honeymoon soon, Harry had no good reason to deny them the extra time.

About that sexual tension though.... Harry thought that he might very well go insane by the time of the wedding. Jennifer and Daphne seemed to be intent on driving him to madness with their teasing. They put on a impromptu fashion show one evening, modelling their undergarments and some of the lingerie they had received at their wedding shower. It was all Harry could do to keep himself from jumping up and ravishing them both. He would have to have dragged his chair along because Jennifer had taken his wand and Daphne had stuck him to the chair and petrified his arms so he couldn't use a wandless spell to free himself.

It was especially hard for Harry to contain himself when the girls began kissing and fondling each other, all the time looking at him and asking if he would like to be in the middle. When they finally let him loose, he walked painfully, bent over, to the bathroom for an ice cold shower.

Damn! He couldn't wait for Easter to be done with!

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Snowdonia National Park

Wales

Voldemort and crew had taken over an abandoned farm house in the park for their headquarters. The defection of Pierre LaFort and his information regarding Voldemort's location had forced them to flee England for the less hostile mountains of Wales. This location also made it harder for the new recruits who might have had second thoughts to make their way to the Ministry to defect. Voldemort's new training officer, a German named Fritz Steinhauer, was a former GSG-9 officer who had been dishonourably discharged for brutality. He was currently making life hell for the other Death Eaters whipping them into shape, sometimes literally. Steinhauer had two brothers, Franz and Dolph, who were in Germany recruiting among the pureblood factions, many of whom were involved as youth in Grindlewald's forces and the Hitler Youth. The new recruits would make their way to him using muggle means, then be marked.

Umbridge was still the second in command, because she was not only sadistic, but also efficient. Although not a strong witch, she took to the Cruciatus Curse with an abandon that would have brought a jealous tear to Bellatrix Lestrange's eye. Voldemort did not really trust her, but he kept her in line with a promise to make her Minister of Magic when he took down the Ministry. Voldemort figured that would last about a month, just until she cleansed the Ministry of

mudbloods and put his loyalists in position, then he would kill her, if for no other reason than that simpering, whinging voice.

Voldemort figured that it would take until the end of May for his forces to be strong and well trained enough to take on the Ministry. He had, with his foreign fighters, a force of 100 strong. If he could double that by the end of May, using the lesser trained Death Eaters as shock troops, then unleashing his hardened troops, the Ministry would fall like a house of cards. With Dumbledore out of his way, Hogwarts would fall quickly. He didn't even count Harry Potter to be any problem; all the brat had ever been able to do was escape him and the incompetent Death Eaters like Lucius Malfoy. The reason he failed previously was that he had attempted to make the Ministry fall from the inside, by placing people in positions to make the Ministry weak. At the best, they had been incompetent. At worst, they were weak willed idiots who would just as easily turn on him, having proven they were traitors.

For no other reason than boredom, Voldemort relaxed into a meditative position and searched for his link to Potter. For the first time in ages, he caught the teen unaware and got a glimpse of what Potter was seeing. And feeling.... there was a girl in front of him wearing nothing but a tiny silver and green bra and thong knickers. She was dancing in front of Potter, but he was looking around another girl in order to see the first. The one sitting on Potter's lap and grinding was wearing a similar get up, but in different colours. It seemed that Potter was in a high state of sexual tension. He watched as the second girl got up from Potter's lap and joined the first in her dance, all the while kissing and caressing the first girl, who he recognized from reports as a Slytherin sixth year. Suddenly, there was a blinding flash of pain, and Voldemort keeled over, falling to the floor.

At the sound of her Lord's body hitting the floor, Dolores Umbridge rushed into the room to her master's side. "My Lord, is there anything I can do?"

Voldemort looked into the frog like face of his second, compared it to what he had seen through Potter's eyes and groaned out; "Dolores, stand still a moment.... CRUCIO!

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Harry was having a great time watching Daphne do her bump and grind dance while Jennifer did the lap dance, that is until Jennifer got up and joined Daphne. He then had a flash of pain in his scar, which began bleeding. The pain was so intense that Harry lost consciousness for a moment. He awakened to find Jennifer daubing his forehead with a damp cloth while Daphne was at the fireplace frantically calling for Madam Pomphrey. He cleared his throat and announced,

"He's back".

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Ministry of Magic

Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Department

Arthur Weasley sat back in his chair following a long day at work. They had been called on several muggle baiting calls, from ballpoint pens charmed to spit acid when used to a full set of biting teacups at a muggle women's garden club meeting. The Obliviators had put in some overtime on that one, having to chase down a attendance list of over a hundred women. Luckily one of the women was a squib who was able to call in on the fellytone. The Ministry maintained an emergency number at the Leaky Cauldron for just such purposes. He looked over at his officemate, Perkins.

"I'm heading home. Are you about ready?"

Perkins waved him off. "Go ahead Arthur. I just got a memo about a cuckoo clock that someone charmed so the bird flies around the room insulting the muggles."

"All right then, I'll see you Monday." Arthur left the room, anxious to get home to some of Molly's cooking.

Perkins waited a few minutes until he was sure Arthur was gone, then went to Arthur's desk and used an unlocking charm on the drawer. He was going to find out what Arthur had been hiding for the past few weeks. He had seen Arthur working on a large rolled up parchment, but when he asked about it, Arthur would roll it up, make some lame excuse, then put it away. This had Perkins losing his normal blasé attitude and begin burning with curiosity.

Perkins found the parchment, took it out and unrolled it. What he saw was an organizational chart, with Queen Elizabeth on the top, Tony Blair directly underneath, with a parallel line to Arthur's name and the title 'Lord Gryffindor, Royal Magical Governor', then a series of lines to boxes made up of ministry departments, some in existence now and some that were new. There was a separate group of lines showing the existing Wizengamot, titled 'House of Magical Lords, and another group that was titled 'Elected Magical House of Commons'. The outrageous part of that were blocks showing seats reserved for goblins, house elves and 'other beings'.

Perkins sat back in his seat with a thump. It was impossible, but the proof was sitting right in front of his face; Arthur Weasley was a traitor to Magical Britain! He was planning a revolution that would turn the government over to muggles, mudbloods and creatures! And he had placed himself where the Minister of Magic should be, doing away with the office completely and reporting only to the Queen, a MUGGLE! This could not stand! He noticed that most of the Ministry spots were not filled in, but he had a werewolf heading an office called, of all things, Lycan Affairs. He needed to get this to the Minister right away. Weasley would be in DMLE custody before

morning, then he, Perkins, would be the Head of the Department! He rolled the chart up and began to stand up, only to be met by the steely-eyed gaze of Arthur Weasley. Perkins gulped. This was not the gentle wizard he had worked with for the past fifteen years; it was the Arthur Weasley who had been known by the Unspeakable code name Bulldog, for the relentless way he tracked and put away Death Eaters back in the first war.

"Going somewhere with that"? Arthur asked, gesturing at the rolled up chart.

"A-a-arthur! Surely not you. Planning a revolution? This is treason!" Since Perkins saw no way out of this, he figured he might as well try to bluff his way past Arthur. He also realized, with a sinking stomach, that it was not going to work.

"Perkins," Arthur said with a sigh, "I was going to make you a department chief, until you went off on those muggles at the restaurant last week. No Perkins, this," pointing at the chart, "is not treason, the way this Ministry has been run the past few hundred years, now THAT is treason. The Ministry was formed to keep the King's peace in the magical world; it was never intended to be separate from the Monarchy. It is out of control and the Queen has decided to bring the magical government back into the fold. Now I could just order you to keep it secret under the authority of Queen Elizabeth II and Merlin's Oath, but I could not be sure that you would do it. Breaking the Oath would mean you would lose your magic and become a squib, but I can't be sure that you wouldn't do it anyway, trying to call my bluff. I assure you though, it is no bluff."

Perkins was beginning to sweat. "So what are you going to do, Arthur? Kill me? I'm loyal to the Ministry, not muggles!"

"Perkins, didn't you feel your magic responding when I mentioned Merlin's Oath? That Oath is what keeps the magical world as subjects to the Monarchy, with all the rights and responsibilities. I'm

bound by the Oath, you're bound by it, and every other magical being in Britain who has ever uttered the name of Merlin is bound by it."

"I'll never be bound to serve some damn muggle!" With a shocked face, Perkins felt 'something' leave him. Arthur shook his head sadly.

"What you just felt was your magic leaving you. You are no more than a squib now. I'm sorry Perkins, but I can't have a squib running around with the information you have in your head right now. OBLIViate!" Arthur then took the organizational chart from Perkins and guided the befuddled squib outside, side-along apparating him to his home, where he stood outside and watched him go inside before apparating back to the Burrow. Perkins would never know why he just woke up one morning with no magic, but Arthur would let him quietly retire with a full pension.

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* They say that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, therefore all credit for this line goes to the genius comedian and ventriloquist Jeff Dunham and Walter. Dragonstorm 316 corrected me on this one; I incorrectly attributed the line to Ron White..... but can't you just hear him saying that while holding that glass of scotch and that huge cigar that looks like a turd from a german shepherd?

CHP29